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MEDIA TRANSFORMATIONS

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**Media Transformations: Framing, Multimodality and Visual
Literacy in Contemporary Media Spaces**

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Abstract

Multimodal theory has developed out of social semiotics and can be seen as a response to the rise in the use of new technologies for the creation, distribution and consumption of media texts and the need to find new ways of describing and explaining their role in representation and communication. Its development is historical. It is a response to change over time. The incorporation of the visual into social semiotics marks a key moment in the development of multimodal theory.

Visual literacy is discussed in relation to changes in modes of representation and a critique of this concept is provided. This is conducted in relation to how the visual modality has been integrated into social semiotics as a platform for research into multimodal communication more generally.

Framing is developed along three main lines of enquiry (semiotic, cognitive and affective) as alternative ways of accounting for some of these shifts in communication and each are presented in the form of case studies. Framing and its close relationship with composition in media texts is discussed and this understanding, one that emphasise proximity as a multimodal principle, is applied to the visual design of content, the realisation of context through the provision visual cues, and later to embodiment and urban space. The three case studies, the application of framing to a range of media texts, the critical judgements made about the role visual in contemporary theory and the application of these concepts to multimodality are presented as part of an intellectual journey.

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Introduction to the Thesis

An Intellectual Journey

The overarching context for this thesis is that of an intellectual journey. A journey that began rather a long time ago it seems now with a reading of the first edition of *Reading Images: a grammar of visual design* (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). In particular, there were important critical issues that this book raised in relation to the role of the visual within theories of communication and especially the relationship between word and image. The ideas set out in the first three chapters of this thesis were largely generated by my reading of Kress and van Leuven's book. My initial interest in this publication and the issues it raised was twofold. First, how could this, apparently new approach to visual semiotics, be integrated into the University curriculum in the context of visual communications courses and the fact that there had been such growth in interest in the concept of visual literacy across a number of areas that use images as a way of representing information? But more importantly for the investigation upheld in this thesis, what was the impact of these ideas on research and, in particular, on general theories of communication such as those provided by semiotics, within art history, and studies of new media – where, it is assumed, the visual now plays a central perhaps more dominant role.

Some of the specifics of this area of interest in visual literacy are spelt out in Chapter Six of *Reading Images* (1996: 181-229), "The Meaning of Composition" and sections within this chapter where the authors argue that there is a binding relation between composition and multimodality, as well as framing which is included as part of their "principles of composition". This area of interest includes the following concerns:

- An approach to the composition of multimodal documents that prioritises layout and space as a crucial system for meaning making.

- Proposed “principles of composition” (183).
- A particular take on framing (214-218) applied specifically to visual design and page layout in “integrated texts”.

What is missing, however, this still remains a concern, is in the way that framing is characterised in their work and this is one of the themes of the critique of visual literacy that is carried in the following chapters, is that framing is seen to be limited to a set of rules governing the arrangement of forms within a composition but not beyond it; there is nothing outside of the frame, so to speak. In film, for example, it is argued that there is an “out-of-field”, a universe of objects that are at least implicit in relation to the objects that are framed within the image (Deleuze, 1986: 17). In the psychology of visual perception, Arnheim, makes the point that composition in abstract painting tends to imply a background and figures that are implied that are beyond or outside of the physical frame (Arnheim, 1982: 52). There are many other ways of defining framing that allude to content implicit outside of the frame, this is where the discussion of context begins and is addressed in some depth later.

This overriding interest then, meant that I was looking out for the potential impact of these ideas on the study of composition in the meaning of images and visual oriented texts and through this, the impact of ideas associated with multimodal theory, also dealt with in some detail in the three chapters that follow. An important addition to this list of concerns was the result of the advent of a great variety of new forms of text that was going under the name of new media: how was the meaning-making potential of these established and subsequently analysed in the context of visual research? What kinds of translation, or transformation occurs in terms of visual messages between print and screen, from meaning making works in more traditional media such as print and what might be perceived as similar spatial and visual forms online? And, what about other forms of, so called, new media and the proliferation of media content into the everyday urban experience?

Both contexts – the university curriculum and the research agenda concerning visuality, visual literacy and new media - are still very close to me in a professional sense, teaching aspects of visual literacy and communication to both undergraduate and postgraduate students, in addition to continuing to conduct research that is driven by a desire to understand how visuality impacts on the experience of the urban (Allen 2008, Siber 2005). This professional interest, in forms of visual literacy, frames my own approach and at times the distinction between the university curriculum and the research agenda become inseparable from one another and the boundaries between them indistinct.

In addition, what would other schools of thought, where the image is the central focus of attention, such as art history, cognitive science, or information design, as distinct disciplines make of the intervention proposed in *Reading Images*? Further, when mentioning framing, what would a more perceptual or cognitive presentation of the issues give rise to? Suffice it to say, the main idea behind the thesis was generated initially out of these concerns. These are concerns that straddle disparate disciplines; that inform both research and teaching in this area; that needed to raise what seemed to be urgent issues during a period of unprecedented changes in the development of new technologies and the forms of communication that occur from their use. A general application of the concept of framing was assumed, at least at the beginning of the project to be a suitable way of connecting all of these concerns. But it wasn't long before this seemingly rich territory for research became too unwieldy, too complex, to form the basis of a linear form of PhD thesis.

Towards a Genealogy: Visual Literacy, Framing and Multimodality

A genealogy of these terms indicates that the concepts of visual literacy, framing and multimodality are interrelated and that they have a history of usage over time. This part of the project is intended to provide an analysis of the uses of these terms that initially grew out of a sense of discomfort about

some of the assumptions made in Kress and van Leeuwen's book (1996) and not least in regard to the relation between different forms of literacy, as either visual competence or the establishment of grammatical forms realised in the visual mode, or indeed the need for any critique of visibility (Foster 1998). This in turn points to the potential lack of integration of any ideas from other disciplines such as art history whose stock in trade is the visual and where the relations between text and image have been a major concern over recent years (Mitchell, 1995 and Elkins 2007). If anything the first three chapters also betrayed confusion as to how bring this recalcitrant set of ideas on the visual into some kind of order. An analysis of the use of certain terms was assumed to be the best way out of this confusion.

Granted, some of the concerns over the use of literacy as a central and overriding concept have been addressed in subsequent research since the publication of *Reading Images*, for example, *Literacy in the New Media Age* (2003) and *Multimodality* (2009) by Gunther Kress, but some, in my view, still remain to be adequately challenged. I have attempted to address these issues in some depth in Chapter Two in terms of theories of the visual and in Chapter Three in relation to my attempts to apply empirical methods through that are proposed by *Reading Images* and related publications (O'Toole, Hodge and Kress). There is something of a genealogy of these ideas, from semiotics of the form set out by Halliday in his "Systemic Functional Linguistics", and their incorporation into Michael O'Toole's work in *The Language of Displayed Art* and Hodge and Kress *Social Semiotics*. All of which are very instructive when it comes to ways of characterising framing in relation to a wide range of possible texts as well as issues surrounding the very nature of multimodality and its foundations. Together, the first three chapters form a case study, one that combines a detailed consideration of the literature relating to the way that the visual modality and multimodal theory is presented in these texts with the testing out of some of the methods proposed by these authors on some actual multimodal texts, both printed and online.

There is another narrative running in the background of this thesis and one that in the end turned out, in my mind, to represent something of a genealogy of the ideas presented in Chapter Six of *Reading Images*. Take framing as a concept, for example. It is given a place in *Reading Images* as part of a set of, so called “principles of composition” and framing here becomes a technical phenomenon, frames are carriers of information, and in terms of semiotics, used to mark out and to mediate the timing of messages, for example, through the arrangement of elements and groups of elements represented in space. But, no sooner had this concept been applied, than another potential definition of framing arrived to disrupt this initial clarity. For example, the use of framing as a cognitive phenomenon, that was first developed by Goffman (1976), then adapted in Tannen (1993) sociolinguistics. There are certain similarities between this latter definition of framing and one that is carried out in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen, except for one key omission: the key role of context at the very point at which a text makes sense to a reader. So, there are also some rather stark differences. In addition, not long after the discussion of framing, cognition and its relations to visual meaning presented in Chapter Four of what follows, along comes a further distinction. That of the body and its relations to framing that was being developed within cultural studies and in relation to new technologies. This important role for context, to my mind, could not be ignored on both of these counts: cognition or embodiment. It has essentially given rise to what is now my current position in relation to this work, that is, where framing is a key phenomenon in the relations of the body and the consumption of contemporary media is established (Massumi, 2002 and Hansen, 2004) and it forms the basis of Chapter Six of the thesis. That is, that it is the body that is ultimately the context within which interpretation and meaning making takes place.

The first two trajectories (the semiotic and the cognitive views on framing) were expanded out from an initial survey of the literature in each case, to a brief test of empirical methods in subsequent chapters, in particular, Chapters Three and Five respectively. The third trajectory (framing and embodiment) no empirical methods were tested necessarily, indeed, the very

theory itself tends to resist an empirical approach, in favour of more phenomenological or affective means upon which to make judgments. But what was achieved in this latter part of the investigation was to establish aspects of the nature of framing when seen in the light of studies of embodiment and in particular in its application to the experience of the urban environment and with much relevance to the analysis of multimodal texts. Thus, returning me back to one of the initial themes that I wanted address, the impact of visual literacy on the urban experience, but at this point where the body becomes the focus of attention serving as the primary frame upon which interpretation should be located.

In the context of the production of the thesis there were many moments when one method would present itself tantalizingly as an adequate alternative others and especially alternatives to the methods proposed in Kress and van Leeuwen's earlier work, for example, the type of discourse analysis, one that introduced a very different looking sign, presented by Deborah Tannen in her book *Framing in Discourse*. Or, the apparent breakthrough that I had experienced when, to counter the lack of a viewing subject in *Reading Images*, embodiment provided one as the very centre of attention.

No sooner had I applied one distinction that went under the name of framing, another alternative distinction would always be there just around the corner to divert my attention, so much so that the potential in the original aim and purpose of the thesis – to establish an integrated theory of framing - was at risk of being lost or at least obscured significantly. In fact, the search for an integrated set of ideas relating to framing, gave rise to the opposite, a set of very fragmentary concepts that resisted integration. Further, and perhaps more critically, how could the sum of this research be presented as an authentic and legitimate contribution to research in these areas? This introduction should serve as my rationale for this being so.

What can so often happen amongst all of the noise is the appearance of some calm, some clarity, that comes through continuous thought applied to a disparate but focussed set of ideas associated with framing and media texts,

not initially knowing what the connection was, but allowing for the potential of these connections to assert themselves and come into being. That is, there became some way out of this confusion that was indicated by some of the detail and a set of ideas resembling a system comes to light.

This is exactly what happened with the concept of proximity. This concept was found in the way that framing and the application of bodies in space and the, so called, proxemic coding in Kress and Hodge's book *Social Semiotics* (1988) who had expanded upon this idea from the work of Edward Hall (1992 ed.). This led to a reading of Michael O'Toole's book *The Language of Displayed Art* (1994) and, in particular, his treatment of Botticelli's *La Primavera*. There are some revealing similarities in both approaches to space. These came in the form of a set of spatial relations in the image that addressed both the representation of elements in the image and the body of the viewer. In both cases this was a rather minor avenue in relation to the empirical strategies indicated in both books. But in terms of the perspective on framing that was being sought here, this was beginning to look like it had great potential. Here, it seemed, was a way of integrating framing as a system in a manageable way that would account for the internal representation of space in images as well as to account for the impact of framing on the viewer and their physical location and engagement with images. The argument is this: that bodies and groups of bodies can be seen in a relation to one another: both spatially and iconographically. This is what both of the above books, to me, were indicating, but without actually naming it so; that there is a highly charged connection between the representation of space, the interaction of the body, and the meanings being represented in the image. To cap it all, it can also be seen that the sense of proximity is also an affective one, we are literally moved by our sense of space and within this the proximity to other bodies, both actual and represented. It is how we make sense of spatial experience. Further, that it is critical to so many forms of social interaction and fundamental to the interpretation of images, how images get to mean something in the first place. It is also an important feature of artistic and creative uses of new media technologies and the exploitation of new spaces for creative expression. A further example, one

from the field of media art, which is used to exemplify these relations, came along in the form of an artwork, Peter Aerschmann's *Augenblike* (2010) an interactive piece displayed on a large screen in an urban location. This was the final turn in this journey. That is, to consider the role of the body in the interpretation of visual images and how interaction was infiltrating the creative use of imagery. Further, to see these in the context of recent theories of embodiment and affect Hansen (2004) and Massumi (2002) in particular whose ideas are taken up in Chapter Six. This also affords a further set of relations, one that to my mind needs to be a central part of framing the image, that is, the relation between the viewer of an image and the image itself, both in its physical location and in relation to the position of the body and that which is being represented.

If the original intention of the thesis was to embark upon an integrated theory and method that encompassed both the insights from the earlier work on semiotics mentioned above with other ways of characterising framing. Unfortunately, the result of these earlier endeavours, the first few years of that journey, had become a rather awkward collection of fragments that fundamentally resisted the integration desired. This may in point of fact say more about the pitfalls in attempting to bring together elements of the various disciplines that themselves fundamentally resist integration, than any actual failure on my part. In this regard, brief mention is made of some experimental work that draws from the style of semiotics to be found in *Reading Images* but attaches this to eye-tracking work that seeks to establish the actual physical moves made by readers of newspapers (Holsanova 2006 and 2007) Here the authors attempt to establish the potential in the use of eye-tracking technology to make judgements about performance and reader behaviour when confronted by aspects of the visual design and composition of multimodal texts (both in print and online) from a position that clearly resembles the “compositional attitude” in semiotics.

Other Journeys

Another way of representing the sense of an intellectual journey, where alternative ways of dealing with framing were sought, is to map the relationship between some of the other seminal texts referred in the thesis and their relationship to recent shifts in media theory. For example, through texts such as *Frame Analysis* (1974) and later *Gender Advertisements* (1976) Ervin Goffman's ideas have been incorporated into the analysis of discourse and social interaction (Tannen, 1993); into the mediation of aspects of everyday life by information and communications technologies (Meyrowitz, 1998); and ideas central to Scollan and Scollan in *Discourses in Place* (2003), where the relation between media use, space and a sense of place are combined. Both Tannen and Goffman's approaches to *framing as discourse*, as messages that form the foundation upon which knowledge about the world and experience is structured, are considered in some depth at the beginning of Chapter Four in the thesis. In fact some of Goffman's ideas have, at times, loomed rather large over parts of this thesis and certainly during the initial stages the concept of "primary frameworks" was used as a way of providing alternatives to the framing from the point of view of contemporary social semiotics and as a way of developing theories of framing that departed from composition and further, used to begin to challenge the representational and descriptive approaches more generally. It is worth noting here the continued impact of some of Goffman's ideas on both framing as a socio-cognitive phenomenon as well as more general concerns of the relations between represented participants and the power relations that these spatial relations signify in images (Bell and Milic, 2002). In addition, in the book *No Sense of Place* (Meyrowitz, 1996) where media consumption in everyday life is seen as a form of displacement from the actual location where media are being consumed we see some important shifts. That is, the displacement indicated in this earlier work within media theory is one that on reflection is somewhat overstated. Either critiqued by the, so called "doubling of place" - discussed in the final chapter of the thesis

- or indeed implicit here and throughout thesis is the notion that all media interactions, processing or reception of media texts is already and always situated in some sense. Interaction always takes place in a specific location. This renders the placelessness of media consumption evident in the earlier work by Meyrovitz if not unsubstantiated at least questioned when it comes to issues of representation, interaction or embodiment. All of these activities are situated in real spaces (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) and discussed in Chapter Six. In addition, Shaun Moores has developed relevant arguments associated with what he called the “doubling of place” through the use of information technologies and consumption of media in public space (Moores, 2004) that could be incorporated into a discussion of framing and the use of technology. Subsequently, Goffman’s concepts of both framing and the social organisation of space in discourse have found their way into more focused discussions of the role of communications technologies and the forging of new forms of interaction within social media and the need to understand issues of identity and self-presentation (Marwick and Boyd, 2011, Newman, 2011, Sutko and Silva, 2011, Rettie, 2009). So, Goffman’s influence has impacted many studies of forms of social interaction and framing in particular and still has relevance in the arena of technologically mediated interaction and to mainstream media theory. As such, Goffman’s ideas have not only provided an alternative to the “compositional attitude” presented in Chapter Three, in many respects they are running in the background, framing, so to speak, the shift in theory away from the frame as a boundary for content to the frame as context and how it determines the whole enterprise of interpretation, as well as the shifting of the frame itself from representation to interactivity and in turn towards embodiment and the body itself as the frame, set out in Chapter Six.

A Rationale

The rationale for presenting these excursions in the form of a thesis is, in my view, justifiable on at least two counts. First, in the way that the work in *Reading Images* has been developed – there has still to be a thorough

critique of some of the assumptions contained in this book regarding the nature of the visual, its relation to contemporary forms of communication and in relation to other, alternative theories relating to visuality and visual culture. More specifically, there has never been a full and thoroughgoing interrogation of the “principles of composition” that is presented in this book as an exemplar of multimodality, as a key way in which two modalities in particular, images and language, combine to make meaning, composition is seen as the means through which image and text can be integrated. Given the continued popularity of this text, this seems a bit of an anachronism. Surely no theory should completely avoid critique. But this seems to have been the case with *Reading Images*, this lack of critique is even more surprising given that the first edition was published as long ago as in 1996.

Soon after its publication some critical judgements were made about this book. Forceville (1999), for example, questioned some of the generalisations that are made in the book and raised concerns about the nature of the evidence provided. Whilst useful in methodological terms, as a potentially new way of applying semiotics to the visual, it may turn out to be the case that not enough evidence had been given to justify some of the broader statements about visual communication and the analysis of such a wide range of media texts. Nor indeed, had it been questioned as to the extent to which the visual was being emphasised and potentially at the expense of a truly multimodal account. There have been few critical statements since then about the arguments presented in *Reading Images*, in particular, there has not at any point been a thorough critique of their general approach to the visual and the way that visual literacy has been used in relation to changes in the “semiotic landscape” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 33-40). The rise in the use of new technologies for the design and creation of media texts is seen to be an important part of this process; the apparent increase in the visual nature of communication more generally. In addition, there has not been a detailed consideration of their approach to composition. Also, the authors develop a version of framing that is a part of a system of composition in multimodal texts. Indeed, it could be said that their “principles of composition” and framing forms an important platform for the study of

multimodal texts in more general. Consequently, the greater part of Chapters Two and Three address these issues directly.

Second, the development of alternative ways of characterising framing and the eventual integration across a range of different academic discourses means that this too can be regarded as a contribution to knowledge. Why? Because there is one concept that seems to be available that will bind these, at time, opposed versions of framing and this is the concept of proximity. This is available to us from the outset with its introduction in *Social Semiotics* (Hodge and Kress, 1988), further in the way that navigation is encoded into multimodal documents, exemplified in the case study on the navigation of content on news websites (see Chapter Five), and finally proximity as a form of framing is applicable to media reception in urban spaces and the relations of the body to the image and the body as frame.

Research Questions

The following research questions have helped to guide the research that is represented in the rest of the thesis. The first questions are methodological in nature and stem, at least in part, from an interest in the application of the concepts of framing and composition in social semiotic approaches to the analysis of media texts.

- How appropriate is the term **Visual Literacy** when trying to account for the inherent multimodality in all forms of media texts?
- In addition, this expression has been used as part of an account of shifts in modes of communication, how appropriate is this?
- Is the way that framing and composition in multimodal accounts, especially in Kress and van Leeuwen's, sufficient to account for the richness and flexibility inherent in new media forms?

- If not, which other methods and approaches might be used in order to provide a more thorough account of framing?
- In turn, is there any way of integrating different ways of characterising framing in the different account described in the thesis?
- In terms of methodology, how do we set about isolating design elements in multimodal texts that **frame** the actual interaction itself?
- Can **framing** be used to account for important shifts in media delivery and the context in which media is consumed?

All of these above questions are dealt with systematically in the closing sections of the thesis.

Thesis Structure

Chapter One: This chapter maps out the overall scope of the thesis and asks why is framing such an important concept in that is woven in an out of the chapters. Other concepts of prime importance throughout are considered here, namely, recent theories of the visual, viscosity and visual literacy all in their own way problematic and contested concepts when applied to quickly to aspects of the contemporary communications environment. Composition, as it is presented in recent multimodal theory, is also introduced as problematic and potentially indicating some deeper difficulties within theories of multimodality. A final section presents some of the major research questions and those issues that have given a sense of direction to the majority of the work that is given voice in rest of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Presents a critique of some ideas relating to the visual and takes issue with the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), and before them Michael O'Toole (1994). It is my hope that this is a balanced critique in the sense that I have taken the opportunity to both acknowledge the

contribution made by these authors to the general field of visual studies, whilst being sceptical of some of the distinctions that they have created, not least in relation to composition and in specific reference to the way that composition is regarded as a system of representation and as a critical system for meaning making.

Chapter Three: Goes further into composition as a distinctive problematic in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996 and 1998). Whilst continuing the critique of ideas from modern semiotics, in tandem with this the chapter provides an empirical study of examples from newspaper front pages in order to exemplify and problematize the distinctions relating to “composition and multimodality”. Many of the examples used in Kress and van Leeuwen’s work draws on newspaper front pages as in some ways paradigmatic. What I have coined the “compositional attitude” in modern semiotics is developed as a response to those concerns levelled at Kress and van Leeuwen (ibid) in particular. However, the net result of the research presented in this chapter is intended to be generative in the sense that looking back to previous work by Kress (ibid.), as well as O’Toole (ibid), has the potential to reformulate framing as a concept within composition in terms of a set of “proxemic relations” governing, for example, the closeness and distance of bodies in space and the meanings that are attached to this phenomenon and in turn assist in countering the criticism of the “principles of composition” levelled in the previous two chapters.

Chapter Four: Takes a look at some alternative ways of using framing to account for the visual presentation of news discourse, specifically through ways that framing has been applied in relation to cognition and construction of meaning and as “structures of expectation” initially presented in the early work of Erwin Goffman (ibid) and later adapted in the work of Deborah Tannen (ibid). In addition to this, some seminal references on the cognitive impact of framing from art history and by doing returns this investigation back to the visual and to question whether it is possible to establish important any visual cues that indicate prior knowledge of the texts in question and

expectations that occur from evidence using visual means. In addition, the notion of a “cognitive style” is developed and the influence of Rudolf Arnheim (1974) and Michael Baxandall (1988) is considerable in relation to art historical approaches, yet their application of the cognitive aspect of interpretation have not been integrated into related work associated with framing as such, another potential omission in *Reading Images*. Therefore, the chapter is intended to divert the general orientation of the thesis away from semiotics and the descriptive modes of analysis developed in chapters two and three towards more naturalistic and experimental methods; used to establish patterns of interaction amongst users of multimodal texts, for example, newspapers and websites.

Chapter Five: This chapter is the second of the empirical chapter, following on from Chapter Three, and represents a brief case study that was intended to deepen the distinctions made in the previous chapter regarding the potential to establish “surface evidence of underlying (thought) structures” (i.e., frames) via the visual channel and investigates, through the use of experimental methods, the claim that it is possible to detect underlying assumptions relating to the reading and navigation of multimodal texts. A range of experiment tools are evaluated and a task was designed to uncover assumptions made about how readers use specific layout elements to navigate and make sense of specific types of media text (newspaper front pages and their presentation on news websites). Up to a point the material used here mirrors that of the previous empirical chapter (Chapter Three), but is dramatically different in its methods, application, and overall orientation. This contrast is intentional as it was a further intention to oppose the descriptive account of multimodal texts given in Chapter Three and the naturalistic account, based on observation of reader performance used in Chapter Five.

Chapter Six: This chapter might at first be seen as something of a departure from the rest of the thesis, but, as part of the intellectual journey indicated earlier I was asked to provide a book chapter based on my current research. This request came at a pivotal point, having completed all of the work that

you now see in the previous chapters. So, rather than presenting a lengthy concluding chapter it was decided that, given that the work in a great many respects grew out of this research, a further case study on the use of large scale media displays in urban spaces was added. This adds a further brief case study on urban screens, by doing so it reaches out to, so called, “augmented space”. And, whilst adopting critical distinctions from previous chapters, certain aspects of layout, for example and the positioning of the body through the use of compositional devices, it furthers the research in an exploratory and in many respects a phenomenological way. It returns to the discussion of the main themes developed in the thesis, in particular, framing, and brings to the fore questions of embodiment, human action, agency, and “affect” (Hansen, 2001), in relation to media consumption and closes the thesis as the final transformation, that is, the migration of content into the public urban experience.

A Note on the Literature Survey

It is customary in a thesis to provide a literature survey in a single chapter. This I have not done. This is in large part due to the interdisciplinary and rather organic nature of what is presented. It is also a function of the intellectual journey that I have attempted to account for in this introduction. The critique of visual literacy presented in the Chapter Two presents some pressing issues in relation to visibility and visual literacy and in itself constitutes a survey of sources relevant to these issues. In fact, rather than being locked in the past, my attempt at an interrogation of this text and other related sources is actually very timely, even in the light of subsequent publications that would appear to depart away from visual predominance, and return to more literary and linguistic forms of literacy. Subsequent chapters deal with the relevant literature for the disciplines and academic discourses that they prioritise. In addition, the links between these exist through framing and the visual qualities of media text. Whilst there is no single chapter that presents a literature survey, this is where the range of sources used and the literature is presented first and followed through in subsequent chapters. If there is no single chapter that brings all of the

relevant literature together, then this, I hope, should not be seen as a weakness of the thesis as a whole; especially given the breadth and interdisciplinary nature of the material that it presents. A deliberate decision was made to ensure that literature from all of the relevant disciplines and sources within them were given voice in specific chapters where this needed to be so. As with all interdisciplinary work there is always the risk of providing breadth rather the depth in the ideas represented. To put this more bluntly, interdisciplinary research does not suit the traditional thesis format.

Chapter One

Visual Literacy, Framing and Multimodality

Introduction

At the very start of the intellectual journey mentioned in the previous chapter a range of theoretical assumptions were investigated. These issues arose out of the consideration of specific theoretical ideas that were derived from a reading of the literature on visual design and visual literacy and the relationship between these and the way that these ideas were being used to justify arguments that related to much wider shifts in visual communication and visual culture. These theoretical assumptions about the visual, about framing and about multimodality, in turn led to the consideration of particular methodological issues, such as the need to substantiate claims being made with appropriate evidence, or how to actually seek out that evidence in the first place. Much of this thinking went well beyond the scope of what was initially intended for the thesis. For the most part these concerns arose from a reading of the literature relating to visual literacy and the use of this concept within semiotics to justify wider shifts in modes of communication and visual culture. It was not long before this initial reading of the literature began to reach much further than semiotics and into other critical areas, such as the role of cognition in performance and interaction, or the reception of media texts in new social spaces, or recent studies of embodiment and affect, or the of framing within media theory, to name only three. This chapter highlights some of these issues whilst simultaneously introducing some of the key terms used in the thesis and developed in more detail in the following chapter.

Some Issues in the Field of Semiotics

On the publication of *Reading Images* along with some other publications written from the same perspective (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 1998), the authors were beginning to prioritise that prioritized some of the multimodal properties of media texts. This brought with it the beginnings of an unequivocal acceptance of the important role played by the visual modality in the design, meaning making and comprehension of a wide variety of text types. This was developed, it is argued, in an area of theoretical work, in an area of semiotics that had traditionally dealt solely with language as the primary mode of study in human communication, language as the primary carrier of meaning.

Therefore, as timely and important as this work was at the time, this theoretical work associated with multimodal communication, whilst acknowledging the important role of visual communication in contemporary media, it is argued, hid some important assumptions and some potential difficulties in its overall strategy. These can be characterised from two perspectives, first as part of a more general critique of visibility and visual literacy, second as way of developing alternative strategies for the analysis of multimodality. Some of these concerns are as follows:

- An over-emphasis of the visual in the analysis of media forms in contemporary communication.
- An ambiguity in relation to the statement that visual forms can operate independently of language at the same time as doing to images only what would ordinarily be done to words – the need for a grammar of images, but one that is generated from beyond the scope of theories of language.
- There are further ambiguities in relation to the integration, or otherwise, between images and word, pictorial communication and language.

- The need to look at performance and the use of graphical resources in meaning making from the perspective of what people actually do with texts and the realisation of meaning.
- To develop forms of framing that goes beyond composition.

These issues, along with a range of others relating to some theoretical concerns associated with how to interpret visual meaning, form the basis of the “critique of visual literacy” undertaken in the following chapter.

Having said this, in later work, for example in *Literacy and the New Media Age*, (Kress , 2003) whilst Kress may have revised his position somewhat and the emphasis on visual literacy, per se, as a way of explaining important transformations in communication had been dropped. However, some of the fallout of the contradictions indicated above would appear, in my view, to remain. These largely occur in how the relationship between image and word is characterised and how this relationship, by implication at least, is used to indicate more general processes in relation to how language and visual communication, as “modes of communication” are seen to combine, as well as when they are seen in the light of more generalised historical processes in association with certain “shifts in modes of communication”:

It is possible to see writing once again moving back in the direction of visuality, whether as letter, or as ‘graphical block’ of writing, as an element of what are in the end fundamentally visual entities, organised and structured through the logic of the visual in many or all of its uses (Kress 2003: 6-7).

Here, then, literacy, in contrast to what was argued in *Reading Images* has in some senses returned to a focus on language and writing in particular, rather than the forms of “visual literacy” promoted throughout the previous work. The separation of image from word in this later work seems to move on from the assumption of there being “logic of the visual” that might be used to explain the binding of image and word back to an emphasis upon language

in the form of literacy. The visual properties of the text would appear to have been set aside and possibly even an abandonment of the possibility of a “new visual literacy”, as was the case in *Reading Images*. Furthermore, having made reference to the “logic of the visual”, which was very much the intention of previous work, and in particular, to the way that composition was developed in earlier theory had also seemed to have been dropped, in favour of literacy and the primacy of the word.

At least in *Reading Images* there was a concrete and detailed attempt to provide a potential “logic of the visual”. Not least through the use of composition and the spatial organisation of texts as a way of arranging and managing meaning, through structures such as “information value”, for example (1996: 183). Whilst the contribution of Kress and van Leeuwen’s work to the development of multimodal theory has been considerable, especially in way that they have integrated visual design into a semiotics of communication, their account, it is argued, still leaves some important questions unanswered.

The notion of “reading images” in itself is worth dwelling upon. In the first instance, it tends to indicate that there are equivalent structures in visuals as there are in language. But the sense of equivalence across both of these modes, it is argued, can only be metaphorical. Composition and the spatial dimension in images is brought in to substantiate this similarity with language and to support this notion that there is a “grammar of images”. In *Reading Images*, the concept of visual literacy takes on a further set of associations and Kress and van Leeuwen in an early section of their book allude to a transition (1996: 21-33), in the context of these, so called shifts in modes of communication, that is from an “old visual literacy” towards a “new visual literacy”. This is important, as it would appear, on the basis of the evidence provided, that neither would seem to work independently in the new communications environment. To return to the previous quote, it is a question of relations between modes, of “writing moving back in the direction of visuality”. Does this mean that writing is moving back to a closer more binding relationship with images, “visuality” per se. Further, are there times

when individual modes become indistinguishable and that there are certain types of resource, forms of layout for instance, that can actually perform both a textual function as well as a compositional or spatial one? The historical development of layout and the organisation of space in communications media such as newspaper front pages are good examples of this and Kress and van Leeuwen allude to this and similar examples from print media as evidence of this historical shift.

Visual literacy as a concept has received acceptance across a number of fields of study, from education to art history, but in doing so it has probably suffered from a too great a variety of interpretations across all of these different academic discourses, including, for example, instructional and graphic design (Chauvin, 2003) and art history (Mitchell 2008, Elkins 2008) where debate ranges from its use in the former, for example, as the use of image in education to the latter, where it becomes central to philosophical arguments relationship between art and language as well as a crucial aspect of human visual processing.

Is it the case that new resources, new tools that afford specific communicational goals, and consequently new skills, have been developed around the use of new media, from the manipulation of images in a bitmap graphics programme or the manipulation of type as a vector graphic or the use of a layout tool for the creation of pages in a magazine or on a website? These are an indication of the reality of visual design in this new communication environment. In this context visual literacy is a practice, in the sense that it is something that people do. The argument here, however, is that it is not a phenomenon that is exclusive to young people. It can be seen as a wider cultural phenomenon, it is also an integral part of many, so called, creative disciplines, from graphic design, photography, or animation, to name only a few. In some domains, in education circles, for example, visual literacy is seen as a specific set of competences that can be judged, evaluated, even assessed.

An important distinction here is the application of visual means to create meaning. Further, there is the combination of pictures and words. Here the

integration of visual messages with language and the use of pictures to function in the delivery of messages is seen as analogous to the structures in language. The “logic of the image”, according to Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images*, is that there are similar structures across the two modes. This suggests that the actions and skills aligned with this notion of literacy can be applied in more than a metaphorical way. In this context at least; the reading of information in graphical form is akin to the ability to read books or to write and as such both can be taught and tested in pretty much the same way.

Whilst there is some relevance in the above definition of visual literacy in the present study, in that it is a practice, its use here, and derived initially from the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 21-33), it is rather more subtle and nuanced than the previous examples suggest. If we see the relationship between the use of technology in both the making of visual texts as well as their distribution, it is possible to use this concept, as Kress and van Leeuwen have, as evidence to support the argument that culturally (1996: 21) at a general societal level, that, in most Western cultures at least, we are experiencing a shift in “modes of communication”, away from the dominance of the word, and writing in particular, to the far more widespread use of images as a “mode of communication”. There are some important distinctions implicit in this argument, not least, as Kress and van Leeuwen discuss in *Reading Images*, the use of visual literacy as a major part of the evidence for this shift; changes in the relationship between images and words; the relationship between representation and performance in the production of meaning; the interdisciplinary nature of the concept and the variability of meanings associated with it. In addition, there are other concepts that in a sense collide with visual literacy, for example, visuality in both art history and cultural studies has received acceptance and has been deployed as a concept to account with these wider, socio-cultural issues and in particular in relation to the role of images in communication and the production of discourse.

If visual literacy is a practice, then it is also performative. This means that it is something that people do. Specific cognitive and motor actions are brought to bear on the interpretation of meaning. To put this another way, visual literacy requires not only the use “semiotic resources” (Jewitt, 2001: 133-140; Jewitt, 2009: 22) associated with language and forms of visual communication, it involves the physical activity of the body and specific cognitive and motor skills are required in order to construct meaning and in order to ‘perform’ specific communicative tasks. Visual Literacy, it is argued, is an important form of human communicative action. Furthermore, it is a process that needs to look beyond semiotics in order for us to make complete sense of it. Some of these more performative aspects relating to visual literacy for the focus of the second case study in Chapter Five and followed by a broader consideration of embodiment and affect in Chapter Six.

All of the issues in this section have become urgent and necessary for critique as a consequence of the assumption that visual literacy and the reception of visual forms have become integrated and have become more prevalent and a seemingly ‘natural’ part of everyday life. Many commentaries on the contemporary communications landscape tend to assume this notion in a transparent, unmediated and uncritical fashion. Many of examples are given in the following chapter. The problems associated with this position are discussed in some depth in the next chapter. This position taken here is used subsequently to justify the need to look beyond semiotics in order to establish a deeper understanding of how the visual is seen to be so ever-present in everyday experience, in addition to the possible dangers associated with an over-emphasis of the visual in communication, which, at times, is done in favour of other important modes and systems of communication.

Why Framing?

From the outset the intention of the research was to establish whether there was any potential in applying framing, if it could be presented as a relatively stable theoretical concept, across a number of disparate disciplinary boundaries. As the initial survey progressed, the list of disciplines where framing could be applied grew ever larger, beginning with semiotics, then art theory and visual communication, to linguistics, cognition, and finally in phenomenology and approaches to embodiment in new media. Each of these disciplines' approaches to framing is represented in the thesis at some stage. But is there any potential in attempting to integrate these different approaches? In addition, could the concept of framing be used also to account for the transformation of content that was currently being, and still is being experienced, in the landscape of new media forms, say, initially from the translation of visual design conventions in print to online presentation as well as to the subsequent migration of content onto a range of potential platforms, from miniature screens on mobile phones to large scale media displays in city centres. Thus, in parallel to the intention to resolve certain theoretical and methodological concerns that were indicated in the previous section, came the question as to whether framing could be used to account for important aspects of the visual design and consumption of media texts delivered across different media platforms. In this sense, the notion of transformations is applicable in two senses, first in relation to media theory, second in relation to physical and technical aspects of the delivery of content. In the opposite direction from the diversity of ways that framing is characterised in the literature, social semiotic (Hodge and Kress, 1988, Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996 and 1998), socio-cognitive (Tannen, 1993, Goffman, 1974) and phenomenological (Hansen 2004), for example, it has been instructive to explore some of the consistencies in usage across these apparently disparate disciplines. In parallel then, there were two related strategies that are developed throughout: a concern for framing as an interpretative concept; a growing interest in media transformations themselves and a concern for some of the very rapid shifts in communication in contemporary media. In addition, issues of scale and locality become a

critical aspect of the design and consumption of media texts and the important set of transformations in the media landscape in ways of looking into how contemporary media and the media texts that carry this were and still are moving into new spaces. That is, that there has been a general cultural trend towards reading content on screen as well as a major shift in the consumption of media forms away from the relatively private context of the home to the widespread infiltration of media content into the public sphere. It was assumed that framing could be brought in as a way of providing some stability in this ever changing landscape. Framing, as both a way of acknowledging what goes on around the text and as a potential way of distinguishing between content and context, throughout this investigation has remained pretty constant in my thinking. Having said this, framing, it is argued, actually resists the application of any one specific methodology. Amongst many other issues, this initially explains the different methodological pathways that this thesis has undergone.

So, from this perspective, framing may, or may not, be examined in terms of any one distinctive methodology. The following was also one of the original aims of the thesis that over time became unworkable. The intention at the outset was to attempt to integrate only two different approaches to the reading of texts: on the one hand, one that focuses on the visual design and layout of texts from a semiotic perspective and, on the other, an approach that emphasises experience (perceptual, cognitive and affective processing); later characterised as the distinction between descriptive and naturalistic approaches. Both methodologies have something different to say about framing. In one, it is a carrier for content. In the other, it is a frame of reference, a means of providing contextual cues for interpretation. Later, the body itself literally embodies both. Each, therefore, characterises a distinctive view on framing and the interpretation or consumption of texts.

One of the advantages of including context, as a set of signs that occur in the space beyond the text, in such a general theory is that framing is ultimately a cognitive phenomenon and should be included as an instrumental aspect of the communication process and brought into discussions about the semiotics of media texts. This is not to say that context excludes current theoretical

work on the analysis of multimodal texts as an alternative to it but rather in the sense that it forms a necessary addition to current thinking. Content and context function simultaneously and one cannot exist without the other. In short, they are to be considered as two sides of the same coin. Framing unites both.

In subsequent chapters, therefore, many different approaches to framing are distinguished. The view from art history, for example, in many respects combines the representational view of framing provided by semiotics with the cognitive and is exemplified in Michael Baxandall's concept of the "cognitive eye" (Baxandall, 1972) and is a concept that is introduced in Chapter Four. To take another example, expectations become another way of distinguishing framing that is, in essence from a cognitive perspective, as expectations, (Goffman 1974, Tannen 1993), but still some awareness or experience of an event outside of the text, so to speak, one that needs to have occurred prior to those expectations being invoked through affect, for example (Hansen 2001, Massumi, 2003). This latter point is developed towards the end of the thesis in Chapter Six.

One structure, or system of framing that constitutes something of a breakthrough in my own work, is that of proximity. It serves that general function of framing across some of the disciplinary boundaries indicated above and is one that can be used to determine many of the visual structures in a variety of media texts. In social semiotics framing is regarded as a system that determines the closeness and distance of elements in the text that functions to support particular readings and ways of interacting with the text (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996 and 1998).. Proximity from the perspective of text interaction encompasses such distinctive design features as the position of entry points, the firstly point of contact into the text, and navigation, or the location and start point of specific reading paths and where subsequent points in the text are followed by readers and are integral to the comprehension and construction of meaning in texts.

Framing, in terms of the design and spatial properties of texts, has a direct impact on proximity and the spatial characteristics of and relations between individual elements in a text. Further, the location of individual elements and their spatial relations with other elements in the text seem to function in very different ways across different media platforms and this is most striking when simply comparing visually identical elements across print-based media and screen-based alternatives, say, between design elements on the pages of newspapers and similar on equivalent websites. Furthermore, these features are significant in relation to a reader's interaction with the text both in terms of the visual design of texts and in terms of the contextual cues provided by them. Both, it is argued, can still be united in terms of their framing. Whilst on the surface certain aspects of their visual design might be similar they will function in very different ways in relation to the actual structure and coherence of the texts in question.

This is the overall theoretical context of the thesis and is intended to provide an understanding of the way that content is represented in new media forms and the transformation of content onto computer screens where once this style of content was produced purely for print. On an empirical level, therefore, the extent to which content is transformed as a consequence of the development of new technologies is discussed in some depth throughout the thesis. Associated with these technology-related issues are the expectations that audiences have in regard to the possibilities inherent in technology as well as the arrangement and structure of content provided by these new media forms.

Expectations might come in the form of assumptions that are made by consumers in relation to the actual structure and organisation of content. Alternatively, they might come in the form of assumptions made in relation to the nature and function of the technology in question and its use. That is to say, the work presented here deals with developing ideas in research relating to multimodal communication at a general cultural level with respect to the presentation of content in new media forms whilst at the same time providing two distinctive ways in which framing that distinguishes between

context and content. Both of these are used throughout to explain the important aspects of the nature of visual communication and in particular the visual design of particular types of text.

The media texts in question are mostly related to the press. The visual representation of news discourse is considered either in the form of paper-based editions and their online versions or, in some cases, a comparison between these different forms of text. However, as it is a general theory that is being sought here, it is not exclusive to publications relating to the national press.

The theoretical ideas being developed here are applicable to many different forms of text and types of media. In the thesis, examples will be taken not just from news discourse but film and public space also. The reason why newspapers and online news are so interesting for us is that the press is very much bound up with this idea that there has been an historical and progressive shift to more visually oriented modes of communication. Probably the same reason why Kress and van Leeuwen used these as key examples as evidence to support their “principles of composition”, although these principles are not exclusively associated with layout in newspaper front pages, they are key examples of this apparent historical shift in the design of media texts.

Framing, “principles of composition” and examples of layout in newspaper front pages is discussed in the case study presented in Chapter Three and are intended to expand upon what Kress and van Leeuwen provided in *Reading Images*, by way of a platform for the development of some key multimodal principles. In addition, the recent history of newspapers reveals the shift approaches to visual design. It could be said that newspapers are in transition and are very much at the centre of the media transformation to which I am alluding to. However, news discourse in either printed or electronic forms is not the only example to be used throughout the thesis as a whole. That is to say, that if one of the central aims of this thesis is to

contribute to a unified theory of framing, it is essential that these ideas are applicable to a wide range of media forms.

Multimodality

Multimodality is a theory of communication that is derived from social semiotic approaches to meaning making and has its roots in linguistics. It expands the analysis of communication from language to other modes and addresses the limitations of seeing language as a complete system. It acknowledges the fact that language requires more than a single mode in order for the realisation of meaning to take place. Multimodality, as a theory, has the potential to account for a wide range of communicative artefacts, which in themselves constitute texts, “(m)ost texts can be described as *communicative artefacts*” (Graddol: 1994:41). In addition, the demands of multimodal theory on both the conceptual understanding of communication and in terms of any methodology deployed for their analysis inevitably means that insights from a number of disciplines are likely to be required in order to successfully analyse texts. Texts perform the task of enabling elements from different modes to combine to form meaning. One of the consequences of this way of defining texts in relation to their multimodal potential is that they can take on many different physical forms, including printed pages or films as well forms of electronic and broadcast media, even buildings and architectural spaces. But texts must have a way of organising and managing the combination of modes or their separation, and this is potentially where framing can be applied.

It is worthwhile explaining briefly some aspects of modes and the implications of this definition on the nature of texts and the processes of representation and signification that are assumed to arise from this. A mode is a system of representation. Another way of putting this would be to say that a mode is a way of packaging communication. Speech and writing are modes. The visual design and the visual presentation of information is a

mode. In both instances, the modes are the individual systems of representation that are used by participants in communication. Resources used in communication come in the form of real physical substance, that is to say that they are material in form (Grodoll 1994: 41-48; Kress 2009: 54-57). In addition, one of the key premises associated with social semiotics and is to do with the fact that signs are social in their origin and use. With regard to this definition the following can be regarded to me modes:

“*Mode* is a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning. *Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack* are examples of modes...” (Kress, 2009: 54).

In social semiotics signs are referred to as “semiotic resources”. They are still signs in the more traditional sense, but as resources, they have a more immediate relationship to the property of being used by participants in any communicative event, that is, by those within a community of users who are competent in their use. All signs are realised through use within a given social situation, that is to say that rather than being arbitrary, as in the Barthian version of the semiotics, signs within the social semiotic approach are always “motivated” signs. It is in this sense that both the signs themselves and the user of those signs are given agency within the process of the realisation of meaning. Signs do not come into being unless they are being used by a particular community of users and hence the insistence on the social nature of signification – “social semiotics”, that is.

Another important dimension of this definition of mode within a more general theory of communication is that all signs, all “semiotic resources” have a material form, they have substance. They are packaged, delivered and received in the medium that is best suited to the task. The page of a book and the type that is printed on it is one potential realisation of writing as a mode. The type, as in the shapes of the letters, in print are set on the page in the form of layout. These are physical resources; they are the actual carriers through which meaning is transmitted and ultimately realised. Type, in the form of printed letters on a page, or the characters on a computer screen, is one way in which language, as writing, is articulated modally. In this sense, a

mode requires the generation of meaning via the manipulation of the actual physical properties of the text and in some instances referred to as the “materiality of modes” (Kress, 2003: 13; 2009: 55 – 57; 2010: 79). These modes are shaped through use within a community of sign makers and sign users, participants in the communication who are able to either manipulate those signs in a way that enables communication or they are consumers who are competent enough in the interpretation of those signs to make meaning. Some modes will be better at particular types of communication than others, they will carry meanings more efficiently than others and this is another key part of how multimodality is defined. Kress has labelled this aspect of how modes and how they are utilised in ways that are suited to the task that they perform, pre-fit for purpose of meaning making as “affordances” (Kress, 2010: 83).

There is some variability, however, as to how a mode is conceptualised within multimodal theory. There is a more general definition - used as a way of distinguishing the use of signs within a given community of users, and another more specific definition that has to satisfy certain conditions - functions - within any communicative event. Both definitions rely on the concept of semiotic resources. Both occur within the representation and exchange of signs within community users.

1. A mode is a “socially shaped resource” (Kress, 2009: 54). It is a system of resources that are used within communication that have identifiable regularities and ones that are both used and recognised within the mode that a particular community have access to.

2. A mode is a system of resources that satisfies specific communicational and grammatical requirements (possesses grammar and lexis) and can be aligned with the three overriding functions seen in language - originally established by Michael Halliday – the textual, ideational and interpersonal metafunctions.

There is a possible tension, therefore, between a more formal more application of mode that adheres to, or in some cases adapts (Burn and Parker, 2003), the functions in communication developed originally by Michael Halliday. A tension, that is, between a definition that sees a system of semiotic resources that satisfies specific communicational requirements - grammar, lexis and 'functions' - of a community of users and a less formal application of mode in relation to the affordances and the efficiency of particular types of semiotic resource by a community of users.

In a discussion of the role of type as a multimodal resource, van Leeuwen (2006: 145 - 153) argues that type adheres to the twofold definition of mode given above. "If a semiotic resource is organised as a 'mode', it has both a grammar and 'lexis'" (2006:145) and instead of its more common interpretation as a medium (ibid: 145) as its physical realisation as text.

One of the graphical roles that type performs is that of managing "salience" (ibid.). Type can be manipulated in such a way as to have a direct bearing in the significance of elements within the layout and the relative importance that is given to them. As such, through salience type can be mapped onto the "textual metafunction" (ibid.). It can also be seen in the ability of type as a graphical element and its impact on meaning and the meaning making potential of other graphical elements around it. Type provides coherence in that it helps structure and organise the meaning of the text. Features such as the size and weight of type, italics, bold, colour, etc. are all ways that type can be manipulated in a way that affects salience.

"Framing", it is argued, satisfies the communicative functions that are both ideational and interpersonal. Framing, from the compositional perspective developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, is "ideational" in the sense that framing has a direct impact on the actual message that is being conveyed in any text, in addition to providing strategies for the interpretation of meaning by participants in the exchange, the "interpersonal" function, that is. Framing does this through, among other properties, in its ability to organise arrange

elements and contributes to the zoning of elements and groups of elements into a larger composition. Of major importance for the thesis is the fact that both systems of salience and framing are an integral part of the “principles of composition” described in *Reading Images* and in other subsequent publications. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

In a discussion of the nature of modes within a general theory of multimodal communication, Kress asks: “*Is Layout a Mode?*” (2010: 88 - 92). This is also developed again in reference to the three Hallidayan metafunctions:

“My three questions are: ‘Can layout form message entities which are internally coherent and which cohere with their environment?’ (the textual function); ‘Can layout represent meanings about the social relations of those engaged in communication?’ (the interpersonal function); and ‘Can layout represent meanings about the world of states, actions and events?’ (the ideational function).

Kress (2010: 88)

Therefore, in order to be considered as a mode from this perspective, groups, clusters or systems of semiotic resources must be able to maintain the coherence of the text (textual); engage with an audience, directly with the subject/observer (interpersonal); say something about a state or condition in the world or represent ideas and concepts (ideational). That is to say that a mode has to operate in the same way as it is set out within this linguistically driven approach to meaning.

It is argued throughout the thesis, and especially in the next two chapters, that space, in the form of a set of compositional devices that includes page layout and the spatial organisation of all elements within the text, contributes significantly to the way that messages and meaning are constructed and most importantly to the manner in which they are received and interpreted. That is to say that the use of both composition and layout are multimodal principles and that both can be seen to be managed through framing. In addition, there are circumstances whereupon composition can be considered

to be a mode given its ability to provide coherence to the text, the way that it engages with an audience and works to deliver messages about states of the world. Therefore, in a similar way as type and layout have been discussed previously, composition can also be considered in many instances to be a mode.

The first and most basic premise in a multimodal approach is that meanings are created through the combination and integration of different codes, modes of representation, or meaning-making systems, and as such they are brought together and combine to form complete, integrated and coherent messages. But this approach has the additional premise, an important one in our case, that all texts are seen to be multimodal. A film, for example, is a multimodal text as it brings together different type of resources, different ways of expressing and articulating messages – including, moving image, spoken word, soundtracks, music, voice-over etc. – and these occur across different sensory channels – vision, voice, listening and so forth.

The sequence, the frame and the shot as key compositional elements in film also combine to form an integrated system through which the meanings associated with the film become intelligible. These aspects of framing in film form part of the “language of film” and as such constitute “semiotic resources”, the resources that filmmakers employ to make meaning and by the same token are essential to the reception of film by audiences. In this sense a communicative artefact such as a film is multimodal (Allen and Goodall, 2007, Rheindorf, 2004) and it is so because of the different modes that it employs in order to make meaning. A film is also a form of text in the sense that it has a material form, it is the surface or physical form in which communication, meanings and messages are made concrete and therefore provide access to the meanings it conveys.

One fundamental principle that arises in consequence is, then, is that of the inherent multimodality in all communication; the ever presence of more than one mode in any communicative act, at the beginning of their piece on the

“critical analysis of page layout...”, Kress and van Leeuwen are unequivocal about this:

All texts are multimodal. Language always has to be realised through, and comes in the company of, other semiotic modes (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998: 186).

In layout then, we see to combination of modes and at the very least the bringing together of different elements from distinctive modes, such as, various compositional structures, space, shape, type, image, and other graphical devices. In addition, there are certain kinds of layout element that possess properties from more than one mode. Type for example, can be interpreted as language, as in the representation of letters that go to form words and sentences, as well as image, when type is designed visually to serve a specific function in the layout, or it is ornamented and embellished with visual signs that in themselves can be seen to create meaning. Type constitutes both language and image. This leaves aside the way that shape perception, or the manipulation of the spatial characteristics such as size, will have an impact on the salience of a particular layout feature.

The position taken by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* was, it is suggested, a major departure within social semiotics, especially the move away from language as being either the dominant or privileged mode in human communication and it is through their adoption of the concept of visual design as a multimodal system they acknowledgement the complexity and variety of in the meaning of texts that arises from this move away from language as either a primary or dominant mode. The key point here being that there will never be just one single system of representation in operation at any one time. Kress and van Leeuwen (1998) continue by stating that:

Language always has to be realized through and comes in the company of other semiotic modes. When we speak, we articulate our message not just in words, but through a complex interplay of speech and sound, of rhythm, of intonation; accompanied by facial expression, gesture and posture. When we write, our message is

expressed not only linguistically, but also through the visual arrangement of marks on the page. Any form of text analysis which ignores this will not be able to account for all the meaning expressed in texts (1998: 186).

Thus, any communication relies on there being a variety of modalities through which messages are articulated and subsequently realized and this will be the case with all texts.

In terms of methodology this involves the systematic ordering of semiotic resources. Further, these resources can be organised into a schema, into what are regarded as the actual systems of meaning. The first task in this kind of approach to communication is usually to begin by listing the resources that occur in a given communicative event or text that is being analysed and to distinguish those elements that occur within a specific mode. Once this is established, their function in the communication is ascertained and the relationship of those resources and their facility in realising meaning are established – as in the “affordances of modes”.

The way that texts are treated from this perspective is important. In more general common sense terms “text” is usually associated with written or printed communication, often to the exclusion of other forms of communication, or indeed, other modalities. Thus, when we talk about the text of an email message, the text of an Act of Parliament or the text of a newspaper story, there is a tacit assumption that the “text” is the material and visible form in which language or narrative is being expressed (Gradoll, 1994: 41 – 42). More often than not, text is associated with the printed form of language, for example, the set text of a course of study ordinarily refers to a book and to the printed copy that it contains. In multimodal approaches, therefore, the term “text” has a much more specific meaning. To illustrate this, let us take an example of a story in a newspaper. As a text, it can be analysed from the point of view that the messages being communicated are being conveyed through more than just one channel or mode. If the text is formed from the interplay of modalities, of systems of representation, or codes, as suggested earlier, then all of the elements that combine to make

up the news story, including the headline, the body copy of the story itself, photographs, as well as any other graphical elements, will all combine to produce a complete, integrated and coherent messages. Even the style of presentation of the news story contributes to the composition and construction of the meanings communicated by the text. For example, even the size, shape and orientation of the newspaper as a whole will make it distinct from others and define its market, its intended audience, that is, as well as its visual style and is one way that such features as genre is indicated in newspaper design. The distinction between quality press and tabloids, for example, is first and foremost articulated through the size and shape of its pages (Book and Schick, 1997; Giles and Hodgson, 1996; Harrower, 2002; Hurlburt, 1977 and 1978. In the context of multimodality it can easily be argued that even a relatively simple spatial element such as the shape of the page, one of the most basic features that make up a newspaper design is not confined to a single modality. It is very much a part of the multimodal characteristics of the text. Type is the same, as a relatively simple graphical element, type relies on both visual and verbal signs for its interpretation by readers. Type is a way of presenting a verbal message (language) but it does so in visual form (image) and its realization is also dependent on the visual modality, as part of the act of seeing.

One of the issues that is discussed in the next two chapters is the extent to whether the study of multimodal communication still relies too much upon its mono-modal past, it origins as primarily a linguistic form of analysis. It has to be asked, why has the study of language a singular and privileged mode for so long been the main object of study? The critique of visual literacy and the potential of other, more historically oriented lines of thinking may actually lead to an answer to this and especially some of the issues discussed by Mitchell (2008; 2002). The argument here is that the study of multimodality is in itself an historical phenomenon, as an approach to communication multimodal theory can be situated historically.

Both the interdisciplinary nature of this research and the intertextual nature of the texts under scrutiny, both now explicit in these newer lines of enquiry into multimodal communication could, on the one hand, be seen as a blessing in

the sense that both theoretical judgements and the methodologies that arise from them facilitate some new and compelling ways of analysing media texts. This is especially the case in the way that modes are integrated into systems that create meaning across a wide range of potential text types. That is, in a manner that serves the potential, and therefore affordances, of types of new media, for example. On the other hand, however, the complexity in dealing with this variety of potential objects of study can also be seen to resist a stable and consistent way of dealing with texts. Especially in the light of a definition of mode that has different meanings as discussed at the beginning of this section. That is, between a more formal definition of mode and its relation to specific function in communication and a less formal definition that is aligned with social use.

Earlier in this discussion of multimodality framing was mentioned in relation how mode was defined within social semiotics. This leads to an issue that is of central importance to this thesis. That is to say, that one key arguments throughout is that this definition of framing is too limited. Whilst framing has been used to here to establish type as a mode, this definition of framing, it is argued, is confined to a set of compositional constraints. This, it will be seen, brings with it both theoretical and methodological limitations.

Conclusion

For the most part this chapter has attempted to provide a platform for the rest of the thesis. This has been done by way of a discussion of the key terms in the title of the thesis and which are subsequently referred to throughout in the chapters that follow.

Visual Literacy: This term has had an impact on the thesis in the following ways. First, it is at the core of the next chapter and is developed there in relation to the critique of this term and my attempts to embed the concept more deeply within the academic discourse relating to visual studies (Chapter Two). It signifies one of the first steps to towards an understanding

media texts from a multimodal perspective, but a perspective, however, at least in some respects be problematic, especially in the context attempts to provide systematic regularities, ones that are purported to represent a possible grammar of images (Chapter Three).

Framing: The position of framing as a concept has been described in relation to its use throughout the thesis as a whole. From the initial, and admittedly flawed strategy originally sought in the research, that is, in my attempts to characterise only two senses of the word framing: between content and context. To what there is now, in the form of at least three different senses of the use of this word: social semiotic (Chapters Two and Three), socio-cognitive (Chapters Four and Five), and embodiment (Chapter Six).

Multimodality: Another concept that looms large over the thesis. As a theoretical perspective this approach to the analysis of media texts has been developed initially from systemic functional linguistics and the way that modes are described in the light of this perspective. The way that framing in the compositional sense is defined is also derived from this perspective. But multimodality as a concept goes beyond the boundaries of any single discipline. All of these points are developed in what follows.

To conclude, framing in the terms described above might be seen to allow the potential for unifying these different approaches and more might yield to the organisation of both semiotic material and sensory information and through this to a way of actually managing modalities. This has the potential of providing further, rather more speculative set of Research Questions.

Is it possible, through the semiotic definition of framing to account for the complex interaction between modes, systems of representation?

Is framing one of the ways that the integration of sensory modalities actually occurs?

The structure of the case studies presented subsequently reflects some of these developments: first, framing as part of the visual presentation of texts;

second, framing as part of cognition and the organisation of knowledge about the world (and of texts); third, how embodiment is ultimately how information is channelled, framed, that is.

Chapter Two

The Poetics of Visual Literacy

Introduction

As in the previous chapter, the point of departure here is still *Reading Images*. But the purpose in doing this in this chapter is as follows:

- To situate this book and in particular its articulation of visual literacy in relation to other ways of defining visual literacy and more generally other ways of describing and accounting for the relation between words and images.
- To investigate the type of language used and how this indicates a particular approach to images and visual communication in more general.
- To relate this to the recent historical development of visual theory, to map out a possible genealogy of these ideas in relation to the role of images in contemporary communication.

First, it is necessary to discuss the general strategy here and the reasons for continuing with a survey of *Reading Images* and what might appear, at times, to be based on a highly selective reading, concentrating on a few specific sections of the book. But the point here is to broaden the debate outward, firstly, towards other areas of academic debate that uses the term visual literacy and to compare this with other approaches and not least to recent debates in art historical studies and related disciplines.

Second, statements are often made in about the increasing viscosity of mass communications and, that somehow the visual has come to dominate communication processes and, therefore, as a part of much wider and more general cultural processes. Examples are given in the first sections of this chapter that stem from academic writing from the mid to late 1960s, exemplified here by such figures as Ernst Gombrich (1972), John Berger (1972), for example. Each of these authors upholds a position with regard to

the visual image that emphasises an ever increasing and more dominant role for the image in contemporary communications. At times it will be argued in this chapter that this position is problematic. That is to say, that the role of the image in communication and of visual representation more generally, may be more complex than these earlier accounts suggest. Yet it seems to be the position that the work undertaken in *Reading Images* has been influenced by this assumption about the role of images and their increasing role as a mode within mass communications in general culture. To add another layer to the critique set out in this chapter, it is possible to see how some of the ideas developed in *Reading Images* might also be seen in relation to other disciplines, where visual literacy and “visual predominance” (Mitchell, 2002), for example, Mitchell (1995, 2002) and Elkins (2008), and other theoretical concerns relating to the image. In this latter context it is possible to see the notion of visual predominance as part of a more general historical process where the relations between image and word comes across as cyclical. In one historical period, it is the word that is in the ascendant, in others, it may be the image. And, that the current ‘rise of the image’ in our own era, is a manifestation of this historical and cyclical phenomenon.

The chapter as it now stands, develops this intention of situating *Reading Images* within both of these contexts: in relation to arguments about visual literacy and general methodological concerns to do with how to describe and explain images; as well as in relation to the broader assumptions that have been made about the role of the image in communication and its relations to language. *Reading Images* exemplifies all of these issues very well and, as such, this chapter has two main functions as a consequence of the reading of the book, it is to serve both as the first part of a literature survey and as the beginning of a general critique of visual literacy that begins with *Reading Images* as its point of departure. This chapter also interrogates the general concept of visual literacy that the book seems to rely upon and develops something of a genealogy of this concept and related issues. Both of which are developed further and deepened in the next chapter.

It is useful here to briefly explain the use of the word “Poetics” in the title of the chapter and “Critique” in the title of one of the central sections in what follows. As an attempt seek out how a certain attitudes towards visuals was being developed within the type of semiotics to which *Reading Images* seems to be aligned, there is a need to establish the kinds of language that was being employed to describe and analyse images, the word “poetics” seemed appropriate to use in the title of the chapter. Further, the term “poetics” is useful for us here because it indicates some rather more general attitudes towards the use of language in certain theoretical discourses, that can be seen to serve some specific critical interest or, at the very least, a form of usage that can be seen to expose tacit assumptions about the role of visual communication and the relations between image and word. An interrogation of “visual Literacy” as an expression might, for example, be seen to indicate a particular approach to the use of theoretical language and further to expose a particular critical attitude (Strier, 1975: 171).

It is also worth pointing out that during this phase of the project Lev Manovich published an important article for us in the journal *Visual Communication* called “The Poetics of Augmented Spaces” (Manovich, 2006). This article was to have a direct bearing on the shape of the thesis and especially the last two chapters. It would become an important moment in defining augmented spaces. But the “poetics” of the title also reflects the rationale and overall strategy taken in the current chapter, whereby the phenomenon of visual literacy is analysed from the point of view of its context of use and the actual critical spaces that this term inhabits.

In terms of the overall journey represented by this thesis there were actually two trajectories along which the investigation could have travelled at this point. One, that required continuing with an interrogation of the way that visual literacy was being used and inside of this inquiry to establish how framing was characterised in *Reading Images*, and whether this was justifiable in the light of the evidence. Another strategy suggested going in search for other definitions of framing, definitions derived from theoretical paradigms other than semiotics. In the end, both were pursued, but the latter

strategy eventually, whilst given a brief mention in the conclusion to this chapter eventually became what is now Chapter Four of the thesis.

Thus, one of the overarching themes of this chapter is that of situating theories of visual communication that articulate some version of “visual literacy”, for example Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), Elkins (2008), and to do this alongside more general studies of visibility, visual communication and visual culture. In some respects these terms are collapsible yet in visual literacy there is at least an implicit correlation between images and language, pictures and words. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996 and 1998), for example, refer to current transformations in the communication environment in terms of the “new visual literacy” (23 – 34). Whilst, others use the identical term to exemplify a more literary and discursive approach to the use of images and is more akin to what many have labelled “visuality” (Elkins, Foster, 1988). In doing so concepts such as multimodality, multimodal communication and media texts are here defined and accounted for in relation to the way that the visual has been accommodated as part of a critical language employed to interpret a wide range of media texts.

There is an important argument being developed here that has three key premises. Firstly, that there is a tendency to overemphasise the role of the visual in communication and to do so possibly at the expense of other equally important modes. Second, that this tendency, which can be detected in *Reading Images*, is one that occurs as rather paradoxical in the light of the application of linguistic forms of analysis used to explain visual messages. Ultimately, Kress and van Leeuwen’s approach is a linguistically-derived theoretical paradigm and one that is also evident in much contemporary multimodal thinking. Third, much debate about the dominance of the visual in communication misses the point because, firstly, as Kress and van Leeuwen argue, all communication is multimodal and therefore cannot be described straightforwardly as either visual or non-visual, and, furthermore, because context, or “structures of expectation” (Tannen, 1993: 35) are fundamental to communication and those structures (as in frames of reference), by their

very nature, can't be described as being either visual or non-visual and probably more appropriate to say that they are pre-verbal/pre-visual.

Questions of Visual Predominance

At this point it is necessary to take what is the first key step towards a critique of visual literacy and to begin to question assumption that communication in the contemporary moment has actually become more visual and that this has occurred at the expense of language as a mode. On the basis of the evidence provided on the following pages it would seem to be the case. Having said this, an important argument is developed in this section that will begin to challenge the transparency of this position. The rhetoric of visual predominance is evident in much of the writing on visual communication – art history and graphic design in particular – it is also evident in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen where there is a *prima facie* case established that, I argue, too readily accepts the predominance of the visual in contemporary communication.

First, I want to present some examples of where assumptions are made about visual predominance and public engagement in culture at large exemplified by writers such as Gombrich (1972), Berger (1972), and Swann (1991), that through mass consumption and the saturation of visual messages in the media, advertising, the press etc., our experience of the world has inevitable become more visual as a consequence of the situation of images. These arguments about the visual amount to hyperbole that tends to exaggerate the extent to which the contemporary communications environment in the West has become dominated and indeed that the world has become saturated by images. In these arguments it is generally accepted that due to the development of such institutions as the press, advertising and the mass media generally, contemporary communication in both the urban and domestic environment has become saturated with visual messages. Even the renowned art historian and visual theorist, Ernst Gombrich, was not able to resist the temptation to make sweeping

statements about the dominance of visual messages in a paper entitled *The Visual Image: Its Place in Communication* that first appeared in a special issue of *Scientific American* in 1972 (reprinted in Gombrich: 1982). He treats the fundamentally visual nature of modern communications and experience as a given, as something already and always in existence:

Ours is a visual age. We are bombarded with pictures from morning to night. Opening our newspaper at breakfast time, we see photographs of men and women in the news, and raising our eyes from the paper, we encounter the picture on the cereal package. The mail arrives and one envelope after another discloses glossy folders with pictures of alluring landscapes and sunbathing girls to entice us to take a holiday cruise, or of elegant menswear to tempt us to have a suit made to measure (137).

Gombrich's assumptions here about visual predominance are based on evidence from everyday life, in this case a scenario of a typical morning breakfast reading the news etc. But what lies behind this narrative is an assumption about the growing role played by images within the general experience of the population. This then becomes a matter of predominance, the image gaining ground over other modes, especially language, leading him to add a further assumption about how we seem to be entering a new cultural situation, whereby, "it has been asserted that we are entering a historical epoch in which the image will take over from the written word." (137). In the same year John Berger's made similar assertions about the role of the visual in what was at the time a groundbreaking study *Ways of Seeing* (1972). This also reinforced this growing trend that assumed a new central role for the visual in the modern world, stating that: "In no other form of society in history has there been such a concentration of images, such a density of visual messages" (1972: 129).

Here Berger was thinking mainly of advertising and other forms of mass media, but these are often represented as the main culprits in the explosion of visual signs and messages in modern culture. In fact, Berger himself used the communicative potential of the key technologies of the time – the richly

illustrated printed pages of a book in combination with video— as complementary media to support his argument. Similar rhetoric has been incorporated in post-structuralist writing on the image, for example, Baudrillard (1987) in his polemic, *The Evil Demon of Images*: “our images, those which unfurl upon and invade our daily life -- images whose proliferation, it should be noted, is potentially infinite, whereas the extension of meaning is always limited precisely by its end” (290).

Writing initially from the point of view of language and its relations to graphic design, Carl Swann (1991) adds a rather dramatic twist to this sense of increasing visibility in contemporary western culture by representing the context of typography in urban spaces as “a cacophony of signs form a large part of the visual environment,” stating also that we are “bombarded” with these visually driven messages (1991: 35). In this loaded language, Swann is indicating the extent to which the senses have become dominated by visual messages in the contemporary world. It is interesting to add that his hyperbole is backed up with statistical evidence on the amount of actual physical space devoted to advertising hoardings in many major world cities (1991: 35). In both works there is a *prima facie* assumption in the discourse about communication in the modern world that things are becoming ever more driven by visual messages, to the point of saturation.

Statements from these different disciplinary perspectives -art history and graphic design - indicate the issues relating to the academic analysis of visual communication and the dominance of the visual in the study of communication. There is, in the arguments presented above and in what follows a tacit assumption that the world, at least in contemporary Western society, that primarily through the rise of technologies and mass communications has indeed become a more visual place. More recently, however, James Elkins (2008) in the preface to his book *Visual Literacy*, begins, “[a] tremendous force of rhetoric has been brought to bear on the notion that ours is a predominantly visual culture” (2008: vii). The previous authors, with their transparent acceptance of the dominance of the visual, or what I will continue to label as a tendency towards “visual predominance”

have made their own contributions to this “force of rhetoric” here alluded to in the preface to beginning of Elkins’ book. In addition, the work of Elkins and others suggests a more critical inclination towards less of a transparent acceptance of visual predominance in reaction to a similar orientation to the visual, therefore, has taken place in the analysis and interpretation of a wide variety of cultural artefacts.

A secondary level of interpretation of the literature on visibility needs to be added here, one that relates to rise in theoretical discourse applied to images and visual communication that in many respects can be seen as a response in academic discourse to this notion of the visual as a mode being in the ascendancy. Theoretical debates around “visibility”, in contemporary theory, and visual literacy as a concept, could easily be seen in the same light as these more general cultural processes. From a theoretical standpoint this is what Mitchell (1991) has termed “the pictorial turn”. Mitchell argues that the use of the image becomes unsettling for certain disciplines, or certain discourses, and that this is how, he argues, it becomes a feature of theoretical work in areas such as semiotics. The development of multimodal theory, for example, developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, could be analysed along these lines. That the study of visual design in this context is evidence of the growing interest in semiotics to the role of other modes specifically forms of visual communication, but still as an adjunct to the linguistic account of communication. That is, the work begun in *Reading Images* and subsequent publications is a sign of a specific shift in recent years in theoretical discourse towards emphasizing the visual in a wide range of cultural texts, the apparent move towards treating “visibility” as singular object of study (Mitchell, 1994: 11-34). In fact, rather than suggesting this pictorial turn is itself a form of visual predominance, Mitchell argues against the, so-called, “fallacy of a pictorial turn” (2002: 173), stating that “the modern era is not unique or unprecedented in its obsession with vision and visual representation.” (ibid.). Further, “to acknowledge the perception of a turn to the visual or to the image as a *commonplace*, a thing that is said casually and unreflecting about our time” (173).

This is the point, that whilst we may accept that there is this greater role for images in contemporary communication, it is, however, questionable as to how unique this phenomenon is and more important that it is necessary to be critical of the tendency towards visual predominance, to assume uncritically the notion that our experience of contemporary life is any more visual than at any other historical period. Mitchell argues that there are many instances in the past where a shift in technology has brought about a consequent shift in the potential of visual perception:

The invention of photography, of oil painting, of artificial perspective, of sculptural casting, of the internet, of writing, of mimesis itself are conspicuous occasions when a new way of making visual images seemed to mark a historical turning point for better or worse (ibid.).

It is interesting to note here that the internet, as a most recent transformation in the production and distribution of images, sits alongside such inventions as say, photography, indicating in their own way the transformative potential of technology in these processes. Though, similar to visual predominance, there are risks in being too deterministic in relation to the role of technology in these, so called, “communication shifts”. In the list of technologies provided in the above quote by Mitchell, there is what seems to be an important omission, the invention of printing. This point will be taken up later as so often current media transformations have been compared to those of the invention of printing. What is important at this point is that the role of images and related technologies there is always the potential to be too deterministic. Granted, technology is most certainly an agent of change, but to assume that current shifts in modes of communication are solely responsible would seem to miss the point. By questioning these assumptions it is possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between technological transformations and various forms of communication including the visual.

In terms of theory, therefore, there are some important questions to be asked about the transparency and apparent obviousness of this phenomenon in

mass culture and the communications environment that we find ourselves in the modern era that is represented here. As Mitchell advocates in his essay “Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture” (2002), the first thing to do in so-called Visual Studies is to make “vision itself visible”. This is a paradox because it is impossible for us to actually see vision but in his view the object of study in relation to visibility is that of unconcealing or revealing the act of vision itself, that is, vision as a distinctly social and mediated phenomenon. That the work to be done here in relation to contemporary forms of visibility is to see what actually lies behind the apparent obviousness of this phenomenon, to establish the nature and extent of visual predominance in these accounts. In the same article, Mitchell lists ten, so called “myths of visual culture” and one of these being that “we live in a predominantly visual age” (Mitchell, 2002:169 – 70).

In relation to a later argument developed in a critique of the concept of “visual media” he begins by arguing that:

On closer inspection, all the so-called visual media turn out to involve other senses (especially touch and hearing). All the media are, from the standpoint of sensory modality, 'mixed media'. The obviousness of this raises two questions: (1) why do we persist in talking about some media as if they were exclusively visual? Is this just shorthand for talking about visual *predominance*? And if so, what does 'predominance mean'? Is it a quantitative issue (*more* visual information than aural or tactile) or a question of qualitative perception, the sense of things reported by the beholder, audience, viewer/listener? (2) Why does it matter what we call 'visual media'? Why should we care about straightening out the confusion? (Mitchell, 2005:257-8)

Here, Mitchell is indicating some of the pitfalls attached to the problem of visual predominance, in particular, that there is a danger of excluding the important role played by other modalities. I have tried in the previous sections to expand on this notion of visual predominance both in terms of what it stands for, as a way of prioritizing the role of the visual, and more

important, how this notion is adopted uncritically within some of the theoretical literature on visual communication. This would actually seem to reinforce the multimodal approach advocated by Kress.

“Visuality”, therefore, indicates a shift on a cultural level in assumptions made about the role of the visual in public communication as well as in theoretical discourse. It suggests a move towards a more prominent role played by images in communication and in theoretical approaches to this and provides an alternative view of culture which has lately challenged the seemingly once dominant paradigm of textuality. Moreover, in recent theoretical writing on communication there has been a tendency, exemplified by Kress and van Leeuwen, towards the notion of multimodal communication, whereby a variety of systems or modes of representation are employed in order to construct meaning within texts and within many forms of text.

In relation to theories of visual literacy, the term *visuality* is used to distinguish sight or vision as a “social fact” (Foster, 1988: ix) from vision as a physical phenomenon, as in the stimulation of the human sensory system. *Visuality* locates images (as visually constructed messages) and their interpretation completely within the realm of the social and in theories of visual literacy the visual is always identified as being situated in some way within social processes and institutions such as education, the mass media (including the press) and so forth. Thus, the dominance of the visual as a means of communication is implicit in visual literacy, which is located within the theoretical discourse on *visuality* and linked to the institutionalisation of the image and vision, for example in the production of news discourse mediated by the institutions of the press and mass media, or in illustrated textbooks as part of the discourse of education. Both of these instances form major concerns for Kress and van Leeuwen. As a “social fact”, then, visual literacy is bound up within practices and processes that both prescribe and mediate the meanings that are realised through the visual. Associated with the phenomenon of *visuality* it is accepted that, largely as a consequence of the rapid development of communications technologies, most modern

cultures in the West have shifted towards more visually oriented ways of communicating.

The point about multimodality is that by making reference to the multiplicity of senses involved in perception and the potential variety of modes of representation, sign making and so on, is that it avoids visual predominance and accepts the necessary fact that all communication engages with many modes. That said, Kress and van Leeuwen, in their, so called "new visual literacy" (1996: 23-34) have a tendency to fall right back into justifying their approach in *Reading Images* by making reference solely to the visual as a singular mode, marked out for special attention as a central feature in their "semiotic landscape".

Granted, the examples that they give, from illustrated children's books, instructional texts, newspaper design and forms of electronic media, all are used to indicate the ascendancy of the visual in contemporary media. However, this position is still flawed in its tendency to be uncritical of the transparency and given-ness associated with the visual. The assumption about the visual goes unquestioned in their account. This is the perspective taken by Mitchell (1994, 2002 and 2005) whose historical perspective takes on a rather different approach and one that clearly acknowledges the phenomenon of visibility but does so from a skeptical and critical stance and by doing so avoids the pitfalls of visual predominance.

There are a couple of problems here that need to be addressed; both constitute questions concerning visual predominance as well as a more general critique of visual literacy. How do we resist the tendency towards visual predominance, what concepts, and subsequent methods can we put in its place? What role is played by technology in the shift towards new, different and potentially multiple modes of communication in what Kress and van Leeuwen call the "semiotic landscape" (1996: 16-20)? Visual literacy and subsequent debates about this in relation to mass communication can be seen as part of a trend in theory, articulated by Mitchell as the "pictorial turn", towards emphasising the visual over and above other modalities. If the aim

of this chapter is to situate the work of Kress and van Leeuwen within more general studies of visuality, it is evident that their work can also be seen in the context of this turn towards the visual. In the next section I want to continue this line of questioning and provide something of a critique of what the approach taken by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* and what they call the “new visual literacy” (1996: 21), not from the point of view of visual predominance, but by comparing it with another form of visual literacy current in theoretical literature in Visual Studies, one, incidentally, that has been established more recently by Mitchell and others (Elkins, 2008).

A Critique of Visual Literacy

Today, at the level of mass communications, it appears that the linguistic message is present in every image [...] which shows that it is not very accurate to talk of a civilization of the image – we are still, and more than ever, a civilization of writing, writing and speech continuing to be the full terms of the information structure (1964; 1977: 38)

According to Barthes, the image and consequently the visual is always reducible to language but Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), having developed an alternative way of doing semiotics take issue with Barthes’ initial formulation about the function of the visual in public communication and the assumption that every image is still reducible to language:

Barthes’ account misses an important point: the visual component of the text is an independently organized and structured message – connected with the verbal text, but in no way dependent on it. (1996, p. 17)

This is a most important step to take; acknowledging that there are representational structures that can be analysed and seen as functioning separately and independently of linguistic structures. However, in the previous section it was seen that there is a danger in over emphasising the role of images and the visual in communication. However, in their characterisation of the “semiotic landscape” (ibid.: 16), if anything, amounts to a mis-reading of Barthes’ semiotics and the role played by language even

in visual messages. Even in Barthes visuals do have their own structure of meaning that is independent of language.

Here I want to conduct a critique of Kress and van Leeuwen's work in *Reading Images* from almost the opposite side of the coin and to question the extent to which it is possible to interpret images in relation to language. The question is whether visual literacy, as espoused by Kress and van Leeuwen, is too much dominated by a theory of language Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and whether, as a theory of images, too much determined by the interpretation of language. In so doing, I will be conducting something of a detailed critique of the ideas that lie behind their book (2006).

The book *Reading Images* presents a specific way of doing semiotics, one that had developed from SFL that is very different from that developed by Barthes in the 'sixties. The visual design of multimodal texts in general has been treated within this contemporary form of semiotics and associated with Systemic Functional Linguistics. As suggested here there are pitfalls in this style of approach to visuals, not least because this body of theory was developed from the description of structures (i.e. functions) in language (speech and writing) and then applied to other modalities, in our case visual communication.

In many respects all semiotic theory, whether it is Barthes' account developed in the 1960s or more recently in Kress and van Leeuwen's account are both derived from a linguistic approaches to the sign (as in Barthes), or semiotic resources (Kress and van Leeuwen). They are similar in this respect. It is still necessary to establish whether the realization of meaning and the forms of analysis that is derived from this is still too much dominated by language as a primary mode, as a paradigm that still dominates the analysis of visuals. Alternatively, if a move away from linguistic forms of analysis can be seen a part of a new approach to semiotics, exemplified by Kress and van Leeuwen's approach, whether this negates the potential of other ways of interpreting visuals, most notably art historical approaches (Bryson et al, 1994, for example) and other forms of analysis

more aligned with cultural theory (Hansen, 2004 and Massumi, 2002). The point here, one that is developed later in this section, is that there is a tension between the two systems of representation that needs to be acknowledged. Further, that the approach advocated by Kress and van Leeuwen can be seen as part of a much wider historical process, one that sees a struggle between modes, where one is seen to be more dominant. Could it be the case that the work developed in *Reading Images* is evidence for a turn towards the visual? Or, is it the case that there are still aspects of their approach that see the linguistic sign remaining dominant?

Furthermore, it is argued that in the key writings on composition in visuals, namely the characterisation of framing is limited. In addition, if the explanatory capacity of framing is extended beyond its spatial and compositional impact on the appearance of multimodal texts, then, it is truly possible to engage with the contextual aspects of the production of meaning. In other words, framing, as it has been characterised in contemporary semiotic approaches to multimodal texts, requires further examination and, as argued in the following chapters, this calls for the analysis of media texts from the point of view of framing as a set of contextual cues. Systemic Functionalism is based on the idea that there are structures in language that are determined by their function within communication. In Halliday's theory of Systemic Functionalism (1973) there are three principal functions in language that are interdependent: an "interpersonal function" that is to do with the social interaction and engagement component in any communication; an "experiential function" that communicates information about a particular reality that is conveyed; and a "textual function" that governs the structure and coherence of the communication.

Michael O'Toole, in his book *The Language of Displayed Art* (1994), attempted to apply Halliday's model of language and in particular he applied the three metafunctions evident in language use to forms of visual art, including, painting, architecture, sculpture. Translating Halliday's metafunctions to serve images: a "modal function" associated with the strategies employed to engage the viewer (1994: 5 - 12), a "representational

function” to do with how the information, messages and meanings are conveyed in the image (12 - 22), a “compositional function” associated with the organisation of individual elements, groups of elements and how these contribute to the “gestalt”, of the whole image. Each of these functions in O’Toole is intended to map onto the schema and, as such, equivalent to the functions originally set out by Halliday’s semiotics of language use (Halliday, 1973). As such, O’Toole’s adoption of the initial theoretical framework set out by Halliday is important, but not the main issue here. What is of importance is that it is possible to detect something of a genealogy of these ideas that attempt to apply theoretical assumptions about the semiotics of language to forms of visual representation. The analysis of images from this perspective, beginning with an original formulation in a general theory of the semiotics of language use in Halliday, to an adaptation of the Halliday’s metafunctions in the work of O’Toole and later to an expansion of this overall programme of establishing a semiotics of visual design in *Reading Images* and beyond. Therefore, O’Toole’s work is very relevant to the argument being developed throughout this chapter, interestingly, in regard to the more general strategy evolving for the thesis, framing occurs as a feature in all three of the functions set out in O’Toole’s functions. This theme is continued in the next chapter, but the argument here rest on the question as to whether it is possible to transparently superimpose these categories from Systemic Functional Linguistics directly onto visuals. It may be the case that there are some properties of visually oriented texts that do work in this way and others that do not.

For the moment, it’s worth dwelling on these ideas as something of a background to the publication of *Reading Images*. But, the brief genealogy of this form of semiotics presented here is highly relevant in that it indicates one of the more general criticisms that can be applied to it, in that its history as part of a general theory of language means that it tends towards a linguistic explanation of visually oriented texts, rather than the other way around. The emphasis is still on forms of literacy that prioritize language and linguistic competence. In addition, Halliday’s original formulation was intended to be

applied to the clauses in language. It could be argued that it is problematic to assume that similar structures occur with the image. That is to say, that the interpretation of the image may be divisible to these atomic structures in any way similar to clauses or sentences.

Similar to “the grammar of visual design”, the subtitle of their book, and the concept being discussed here, that of “visual literacy”, both appear at first sight to be contradictory in the sense that they combine seemingly opposed modes, the visual, on the one hand, and either structure or competencies in language use, on the other. Having said this, one of the expressed intentions behind their book was to establish similarities between structures in language and the production of meaning in images.

Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so our visual 'grammar' will describe the way in which depicted elements - people, places and things - combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension (1996: 1).

It is important at this point to unpack some of the assumptions made at the beginning of their book about the potential of a visual grammar and to question the extent to which the notion of a grammar – as a way of establishing structure and regularities in language – can actually be applied to images and to visual communication in general. Is this approach to visual communication genuinely one that seeks out the structure of visuals in the same sense of that of grammar in language? As a general strategy for the interpretation of images, to what extent is it possible to do language with images in this way? My argument is that we cannot have it both ways around and that this is a possible confusion in their approach. Kress and van Leeuwen have adopted aspects of Systemic Functional Linguistics and incorporated this into their study. Here, I argue, that there may be limits to this strategy and question whether the application of this specific form of analysis, one that prioritizes structure in language is actually applicable to the study of images. For example, they begin with the complaint that “not much attention has been paid to the meanings of regularities in the way

image elements are used - in short to their grammar - at least not in explicit and systematic ways" (2006: 1). Here the first step in their strategy is to isolate "image elements", that is to begin with the process of breaking a text down into constituent units – we shall attempt this in the section that follows. Further, they attempt to provide "usable descriptions of compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of Western visual semiotics." (1). Here there is another problem; Kress and van Leeuwen make what appears to be a crucial distinction between different writing systems across different cultures: "The writing directions of cultures vary: from right to left, from top to bottom, in a circular fashion from the centre to the outside " (2006: 4).

But is it necessarily the case that the prevailing direction of different writing systems actually determines the way that images and visuals are structured? Because it looks as though the authors are making a binding relationship between the writing directions of different cultures and the way that composition and framing works in forms of visual communication. There appears to be a strong similarity between this statement about writing systems and the visual design and composition of multimodal texts that they propose in a later chapter "The Meaning of Composition" (2006: 175-214) and in particular their "given/new" distinction with its emphasis on the left/right orientation of compositional elements such as page layout. This begs at least two questions. One, is it possible to establish such a relationship between writing systems and forms of visual representation, in this case the composition of multimodal texts? Two, does this then become evidence that forms of visual representation can never actually be truly free or independent from language?

In the use of page layout, such an important feature of multimodal texts, as suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen, and forms the basis of a great many of their examples, it is not the case that conventions in layout are based on those of writing. If it were the case there would be no potential for "the visual component of the text is an independently organized and structured message" (6) and returns us back to where we began with Barthes and his

assertion that the image can never be truly independent from language. In addition, what should we make of this: "The unity of Western design is not some intrinsic feature of visuality" (ibid.), but neither is it necessarily determined by structure in language or by the development of conventions in writing? This comment is pivotal to the way that Kress and van Leeuwen develop their analysis of the compositional structures in the visual component of texts and one, as indicated here, that tends still to leave language, and writing, as the dominant mode.

Having said this, they are right in suggesting that conventions in visual design, for example, are just that: conventions. However, this seems to contradict the suggestion that approaches to visual design in a given culture are bound up with conventions in writing. Otherwise, this would seem to suggest that there is "some intrinsic feature of visuality" and that this is bound up with conventions in writing. Conventions are an important aspect of the design and layout of many forms of media text, not least in newspaper and magazine layouts. Examples of these will be given in the next section that will indicate clearly how much these conventions can be seen as truly independent of the development of language and certainly not necessarily as a consequence of writing direction. The question of modality is important here as it is this that distinguishes it from other types of semiotics, for example, that developed by Roland Barthes in the 1960s. As such, the semiotics developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* has its own distinctive history and development.

In this respect, there are other useful ways that the important role of the picture and word combinations, and consequently forms of visual literacy both as a method in analysing communication and as competency or a set of "semiotic resources" in contemporary communication. Here I have in mind Mitchell's "iconology" (1986, 1996) and provides another way of characterising forms of "visual literacy":

Among the most interesting and complex versions of this struggle [for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs] is what might be called

the relationship of subversion, in which language or imagery looks into its own heart and finds lurking there its opposite number

[...]

The relationship between words and images reflects, within the realm of representation, signification and communication, the relations we posit between symbols and the world, signs and their meaning. (Mitchell, 1986: 46)

This again begs a few questions in relation to more general concerns about visual literacy and what we do with visuals. Do we make language out of pictures – or is something else going on? What we have here, therefore, is two different takes on visual literacy: one that sees the breaking down of language (literacy and writing) as the dominant mode in Western culture; another that takes the issue of predominance and argues from the point of view of the historical specificity of this phenomenon.

The argument up to this point has been that visual literacy hides an important contradiction: first it exposes a tendency toward visual predominance and a potential over-determination in relation to the role of the visual in contemporary communication. Due to the emphasis on structure in language, an emphasis on grammar, exposes this theory of literacy as fundamentally linguistically based and as such it may be limited in its capacity to deal fully with images. Therefore, this difficulty is twofold. This version of visual literacy reinforces, so called visual predominance and the transparent assumption made about images and their capacity to either dominate or transcend language. In addition, that, given that this version of visual literacy has a legacy that stems from the study of language, its capacity to explain important aspects of the nature of images may be limited.

Front Pages: Visual Design, Layout and Remediation

Is it possible to detect a historical shift in approaches to visual design and the development of conventions in visual design and page layout? Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) use visual design and layout in more than one publication (1998) to exemplify the shift away from writing as the dominant mode towards a greater reliance on visuals in the design and overall appearance of texts. In addition, they use this, and other forms of publication and genre, as examples to support their “principles of composition”. Although a detailed descriptive analysis and a further critique of social semiotics is left for the next chapter, in this section it is necessary to describe some key areas relating to the historical development of media texts such as newspapers and how these changes are manifested in the visual design, shape, layout of particular forms of media texts. The following chapters all use various aspects of the visual component in news discourse, both printed and online, as a key transformation in the design and dissemination of media texts in general.

Kress and van Leeuwen use newspapers because they exemplify perfectly some of the issues discussed so far, both in terms of their visual appearance as media texts and, because as a medium, historically they too have changed relatively rapidly over time. Indeed, many of the changes that have occurred in the design of newspaper pages have happened over the period discussed in this chapter, from the mid-1960s, with the development of modular layout schemes, the growing use of photography, the introduction of colour into the press, for example. Interestingly, and probably no coincidence, that some of the sources cited in the previous sections were published at the beginning of this period and this interest in the growing visuality of the press is to some extent mirrored in the literature about visual communication discussed in earlier sections.

To what extent can these changes in the design and structure of newspapers be seen as evidence for wider cultural shifts in modes of communication? This section will discuss some of the ways that the development of

conventions in visual design have been interpreted. Changes to specific features in the layout on the front pages of newspapers, as part of the overall shaping of the page and the spatial organization of content, has the potential to provide evidence for more general changes in approaches to visual design. Through such phenomena as the variation in the presentation of type as well as the intentional and self-conscious use of spacing; the use of blank space, white space, margins, gutters and columns, for example. All of these are graphical elements that provide important cues on the front pages of newspaper that have led Kress and van Leeuwen to suggest that:

In newspapers, the pages of the 1960s are black and white, and covered in print: in the 1990s, by contrast, there is colour, there are images; and in many contemporary Western newspapers print has very nearly been pushed off the page” (Kress, 1998b: 57).

Front pages of national daily newspapers are a set of examples that Kress and van Leeuwen used to characterise some of these shifts in communication. Admittedly, these changes are striking and have occurred relatively rapidly if seen in the context broader approaches to visual design. It is at least implied here that these changes in approaches to design constitute evidence for an historical shift away from language - the use of compressed type with little variation - and towards visuals as a dominant mode - the integration of photography and other illustrative material, the use of colour photography and the colonization of pages by a variety of graphical devices, information graphics, navigational cues and ornamental graphics.

One consequence of these developments in the design of forms of media text is the progressive breaking up of the text into smaller units. But to what extent can these relatively recent changes in the visual design of media texts be seen as evidence for the breaking up of the paradigm of language as the primary mode in culture at large? This phenomenon of the fragmentation of the text along compositional lines is itself a form of framing in the way that the text is divided and separated into discrete units that are created visually, each textual unit, equivalent to one ‘story’ is framed by its separation from

other units and this is managed through the use of specific layout features. These, so called, modular layout schemes have become a fundamental convention in terms of the composition, spatial structure of newspaper design (Hurlburt, 1977, 1982) and the following chapter will deal with these issues at some length.

At this point it is instructive briefly look at some alternative ways of characterising some of these changes in the visual design of newspapers and, in addition, to consider the role played by technology in the transformation, or translation, of some of these conventions and especially the way that some of these conventions have been adopted onto the web. The reason for this is not to provide an alternative explanation for these historical changes, but rather to indicate their complexity. The structure developed here, by considering first the role of visual design conventions in print, as exemplified by newspaper front pages, not only provides a way of further interrogating the approach taken by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* and subsequent publications where they use newspaper front pages as paradigmatic. It also reflects the structure of the case study in the next chapter, by beginning with print and moving on from this to look at visual design and navigational cues online in apparently equivalent types of publication. The following example also pre-empts some of the experimental work presented in Chapter Five relating to the cognition and the way that visual design cues are interpreted by readers. Editions of *USA Today* are used in both of the case studies discussed in these chapters.

A specific and well-documented instance of this progressive shift towards the visual in newspapers, for many, was the launch in 1982 of *USA Today* which allegedly marked a milestone in the redefinition of approaches to visual design and layout in the press in print. This departure from more traditional approaches to graphics and layout was apparently “a clever combination of lessons learned from magazines, film, and television” (Lupton and Miller, 1996: 144) and its layout resembled “a full colour printout of a half-hour of network news and commercials” (ibid: 144) at least assume that the visual design of a publication such as *USA Today* borrows many of its graphical

conventions and layout features from other popular media forms, in this case, the migration of structures and conventions from television into print.

In terms of visual design and the development of graphical conventions in the presentation of news media, Bolter and Grusin (1999) use the term “remediation” to account for the appropriation and translation of conventions across different media, across different modes of representation, and, at times, across different historical periods. It suggests that this is one of the key areas that need to be addressed when analyzing new media forms. They articulate a different point of view on the presentation of news discourse in print, arguing that “visually *USA Today* does not draw primarily on television. Its layout resembles a multimedia computer application more than it does a television broadcast; the paper attempts to emulate in print the graphical user interface of a website.” (2001: 40). Whether or not we agree with the actual source of such graphical conventions – whether they can be located in the design of television news bulletins or in computer interfaces is not necessarily the issue here but the argument for “remediation” is an interesting one in our context. What is common to both statements about the design and layout of *USA Today* is the fact that visual design has become central to our understanding of the status of the newspaper within contemporary culture, that visual design has become central to the way that such media texts are created and interpreted. That is, both in terms of perceived innovations in graphic design or in how we place media texts such as the front pages of newspapers within a culture where communication is dominated by visual signs, messages and meanings. Here the visual is emphasised, assumed to predominate and has become the means by which it can be interpreted: print news as visual discourse if you will.

In addition, it would be easy to assume that development of graphical conventions in the visual presentation of news has occurred as a consequence of the historical shift in modes of communication that has given rise to the so called “new visual literacy” articulated in *Reading Images*, but that the argument here in relation to remediation might also fall into the rhetoric of visual predominance identified in the previous sections. There is a

further argument here about the role of technology. Both interpretations exemplify what is meant by “remediation” - the crossing over of conventions in the design of texts from one medium to another, further, the integration of conventions from a previous technology to a new one. This analysis of technology from the point of view of its impact on design seems to be indicating a direct relation between the adoption of technology and the increased visual orientation media texts. But this too may be turn out to be somewhat over-deterministic.

It is, therefore, too simplistic to speak of transformation in terms of moving from a culture of the word (writing) to a culture of images (visual communication). The key argument concerning textual transformations proposed here and for the rest of the thesis is that, framing, and therefore, context, is decisive. Further, that there is no content without context. It is too easy to say that either the word or the image is dominant as modes of representation.

In addition, we can easily say the same about technology. Implicit, so far in the examples provided in this section is a potential opposition between print-based media and online new media (screen-based). It is too easy to say that these are also in opposition. At the current stage of development it is too simplistic to characterize such developments in media to have arisen directly as a consequence of new technology. Bolter has argued that, “[t]he issue is not so much a conflict between print on paper and pixels on a computer screen; it is rather a conflict between modes of representation”. Further that, “In fact print and electronic technology seem to be moving along parallel lines as our culture revises its sense[...], apparent in newspapers and magazines, particularly ones associated with new media” (1996: 257). This is interesting in the sense that it returns us back to a dilemma about this contest between words and images

This chapter has attempted to position the work of Kress and van Leeuwen in relation to other work that is aligned with the notion of visual literacy (Elkins, 2003 and Mitchell, 2003) as well as to look at their theory in relation

to more general concerns about visual predominance that informs much writing about visual culture. Whilst questioning the transparency of assumptions made about visual predominance it can be seen that there are important debates about the relationship between pictures and words and between the way the images are written about and how they are frequently interpreted in reference to language theory. The overall argument is that the case for new thinking around visual communication and the promotion of the concept of multimodal communication has been made, but that this has been done at a cost as exemplified by what has been set out in *Reading Images* in that, whilst all communication is multimodal, why then fall back into the visual as a predominant mode of representation? Surely, this misses the point about multimodality. The point here, however, is not to critique this work and then to dispose of it, because, whilst there are pitfalls in the approach taken in *Reading Images* to do with its genealogy as a language oriented body of theory it does, on the other hand, indicate many potential avenues for new work- not least in what follows in the next chapter. But this chapter has largely been about the terms of reference for the debate and the discourse within which it is intended to be situated, in particular to acknowledge the position of Kress and van Leeuwen's work as part of the "pictorial turn" within the Human Sciences emphasised by Mitchell (1996). In addition, there is a wider point of reference here in relation to the positioning of a book such as *Reading Images* and in relation to the recent development of multimodal theory.

A further difficulty arises in their approach to composite texts such as newspaper front pages and visuals in more general and this applies to reading order. It is assumed that the spatial orientation of pages is influenced by the development of writing systems. That is, that the direction taken in the reading process as something that consequently determines the structure of visuals. However, it could easily be argued that this is not actually the case. This may work well for texts where the image is clearly present among columns of type, an abundance of language, so to speak, as in the pages of newspapers or illustrated books. But these are documents that are intended to be *read* in the first place – language here is still the primary mode and

therefore, rightly perhaps in these circumstances, has priority over images. So, that in Western culture, the habit of reading will be from left to right and the visual structures in the design of the text will often be oriented in this way. But, this does not have to be the case for all visuals. There are many examples of the reading order in images and the compositional devices used that are actually oriented in the opposite direction – from right to left. There is an example in the next chapter which does just this – *La Primavera* by Botticelli - an example used as a pivotal case study in Michael O'Toole's book *The Language of Displayed Art* (1994). The point being that the orientation of visual design – its predominant direction – is in fact variable and that the left to right/top to bottom orientation (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 179 – 203 and 1998: 189 - 196) will only work for certain types of text and in particular ones where reading and scanning are essential for making sense of the content in the text such as newspapers.

Conclusion

There are number of types of compositional framing that are implicit in the previous section. These will be developed further in the next chapter. First, framing can be used to account for the fragmentation of media texts, exemplified by the introduction newspaper front pages, and the organisation of space into distinctive textual units, often rectangular in structure and, as such, emphasising this notion of the frame as a boundary for distinctive units of discourse. Second, framing can account for the way that the structure of the reading process is ordered, the structure of interpretation, so to speak, and in particular through the order and timing of messages within the text. Both of these are developed in the next chapter. Associated with these compositional aspects of framing are the relationship between framing and reading order and this constitutes an important backdrop to the second case study in Chapter Five. Thus, framing has an impact on both the ordering of content and the meanings that are subsequently delivered. Furthermore, framing positions the reader in relation to content, both physically in terms of the actual position and location of the reader in relation to the content.

Orienting the viewer is a key part of the function of framing and this is also evident in relation to cues that exist within the text: a point of view, both physically, and in terms of the messages and meaning contained by the text. In the penultimate chapter, we go beyond this, and see framing from the point of view of embodiment, and by so doing, circumventing much of the difficulties inherent in the descriptive account played out here and in the next chapter.

Finally, whilst it was first published some time ago, the book *Reading Images*, it is suggested, still marks an important moment in the development of multimodal theory. It was arguably one of first attempts in any comprehensive way to apply some of the principles of social semiotics directly to visuals. Two other books with a very similar heritage, (as Halliday inspired works) were published prior to this – Hodge and Kress (1998) and O'Toole (1994) and both are very useful for the account being developed here, both have been mentioned in this chapter, as part of a “critique of visual literacy”, the argument established here is developed and used in the chapter that follows, and elsewhere, especially when looking at the spatial properties of media texts and the key relationships that are established through such properties as proximity. In addition, each of these books considers the role of framing as an important one in relation to meaning making, but on many different levels. The survey that has been established in this chapter, as an interrogation of aspects of social semiotics, is continued into the next chapter through the application of framing as a set of compositional constraints.

Chapter Three

Framing: the compositional attitude

Aesthetically, the frame does not only limit the range of visual objects that constitute the work. It also defines the reality status of works of art as distinguished from the setting of daily life. The frame makes its appearance when the work is no longer considered an integral part of the social setting, but a statement about that setting.

(Arnheim, 1982:52)

We take for granted as indispensable means the rectangular frame of the sheet of paper and its clearly defined smooth surface on which one draws and writes. But such a field corresponds to nothing in nature or in mental imagery where the phantoms of visual memory come up with a vague and unbounded void.

(Schapiro, 1969: 223)

Introduction

Originally the thesis was to be presented in two distinct parts, where a clear distinction was to be made between content and context. This chapter deals with the first of these, the framing of content and the location and positioning of individual elements within a complete composition. A gap is identified in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen. Framing, if seen as an element within composition, renders many aspects of the context that surrounds the reception of images as absent. Framing is incorporated into their approach to the multimodal properties, in particular, the integration of image and text, occur as a consequence of composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 181). The two quotes at the beginning of the chapter are used to suggest other important ways of characterising framing that appear to be absent in Kress and van Leeuwen's account. Both quotes above point to different, yet related, forms of framing, ones that are generated from an emphasis on the compositional properties of painting in the first instance but broadened out to

aspects of meaning that occur outside of the frames physical boundaries. Both explicitly refer to aspects of the world beyond the surface of the image and beyond the frame as a physical entity and, as such, to the context, the work going on around the text that the image is to be found in or to be seen to be related to. The provision of this contextual information is integral to the meaning of the text, but it occurs outside of it. Art historical ways of characterising framing in this manner will be useful for us on many levels. Arnheim (1983: 52), for example, indicates that the frame limits the “range of objects that constitute the work”. Here the frame is a boundary for content, but in addition, the frame separates the image from the reality that surrounds it, distinguishes it from its surroundings and becomes a reflective component, one that comments upon the world outside the image. Here the image is given agency in the sense that it is the presence of the image that draws in material from its surroundings. The frame marks the separation of the image from its physical context to a phenomenological one. In the second quote, (Schapiro, 1969: 223) the meaning of the frame points in the opposite direction, so to speak, in the direction of the cognitive, whereby the external, physical frame, so often assumed to be a rectangular structure, does not correlate to anything specific in the mind, as a “vague and unbounded void” (ibid.). Whilst this refers to the cognitive aspects of the frame as a mental, non-physical and internal structure, albeit, one that is being questioned here, as “phantoms of visual memory”. This last point is taken up in the following chapter.

I have labelled the approaches to images and visually oriented texts found in social semiotics that are discussed in this chapter, exemplified by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996 and 1998) prior to this O’Toole (1994) the “compositional attitude”, as in the title of the chapter. This notion of an “attitude” was taken from the work of Norman Bryson in his book *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (1983) where Bryson refers to the “natural attitude” in visual studies and as approach towards the image that sees aspects of the history of painting in relation to the desire to make copies of the real, and hence a desire for naturalism in painting, a phenomenon in representation that is then taken up in critical writing and interpretation of art from particular

historical periods. The term “compositional attitude”, therefore, is used in the title of this chapter to suggest that one of the key ways that the visual (visuality) has been dealt with in the type of semiotics exemplified by Kress and van Leeuwen, emphasises composition both as an integrating principle, as a system that imposes structure upon the individual elements contained within the boundaries of the frame, in addition to the set of relations between the individual elements within the composition. Both of these phenomena are dealt with in some depth in the case study that follows in this chapter.

It will be seen that framing, in the compositional sense being developed in this chapter, has a key role to play in this system. That is, composition seems to embody a wide range of spatial characteristics in a great many forms of text and occurs, it is argued, as a consequence of framing, and not, as Kress and van Leeuwen seem to argue, the other way around, framing as a consequence of the compositional qualities of the text. Michael O’Toole’s account of painting, discussed in the section that follows is characterised here as an important precursor to the methods used by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images*, and deals directly with composition as a specified “function” in his account of painting. O’Toole’s account is derived directly from Systemic Functional Linguistics and, it is argued, so do many of the theoretical assumptions and methods discussed in *Reading Images*.

Questions need to be asked as to what is the function of framing in the approach to visual communication established by Kress and van Leeuwen and to the way that it is integrated into the compositional aspects of images and to visually oriented texts.

- How effective is the approach taken in *Reading Images* as part of a more general descriptive approach to media texts?
- What is the relationship between the theory of communication that this work is derived from and the methodology used in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen?

- What is missing from the account of framing in *Reading Images* and other similar publications?
- What other approaches to framing might be required in order to complete the picture, so to speak?

Driven by the above questions, this chapter becomes a testing ground for the methods used by Kress and van Leeuwen and is also in many respects a continuation of the critique developed in the previous chapter. It is also an attempt to tease out some of strengths and weaknesses the inadequacies of this style of approach at the level of detailed analysis of specific types of text. First, it looks at the way that Michael O'Toole has interpreted a range of art objects, and painting in particular, and how this material can assist us in embedding the work in *Reading Images* further within the paradigm of Systemic Functional Linguistics and into the more recent development of multimodal theory. Whilst semiotics, of the kind promoted in the work of authors such as Kress and van Leeuwen and O'Toole, has the potential to facilitate the fine-grained analysis that is attempted in this chapter, is it possible, through the consideration of framing to go beyond this, literally to go beyond the boundaries of the frame?

Furthermore, if seen in relation to the recent development of multimodal theory, that is, as part of the genealogy mentioned in the previous chapter, the publication of *Reading Images*, it is suggested, marks an important pivotal moment in this development. On the one hand, the compositional ideas set out in Chapter Six of their book in particular, with the somewhat revealing title of the first section "Composition and the Multimodal Text" (1996: 175), which can be related back to earlier texts that fit broadly into the Systemic Functionalist paradigm (O'Toole, 1994; Hodge and Kress, 1988). On the other hand, it can be seen as an important precursor to later versions of the same argument but more explicitly associated with the concept of multimodality. These connections are important it makes links across the

field of semiotics. In doing so, it becomes an opportunity to reflect on what these relatively recent developments in the theory of communication mean in the wider perspective and as such should in itself be seen as a “contribution to knowledge” in this area. To date, no such interrogation has taken place and whilst the first edition of *Reading Images* seems like a long time ago now, it still has not been treated to a thorough critique as attempted here.

More specifically, in relation to the semiotic analysis being interrogated, two publications become of particular importance, *Reading Images*, and not soon after this a chapter appeared in the book *Approaches to Media Discourse* (1998) under the title “Front Pages: (The Critical) Analysis of Newspaper Layout”. Both publications draw upon layout as a specific process in the visual design of media texts and more specifically they both make reference to newspaper design and the historical development of visual design in newspaper front pages. The authors use their observations about changes in visual orientation, of increased visuality, to exemplify the shift in approaches to design and to the increasing importance of visuals in the presentation of discourse and in the reception of these forms. But also these examples are used as an indication of broader and more general shifts in the visual component in media texts and the rise of visual design, layout and use of images, in favour of compressed text that formed the chief component in the design of front pages in the past.

The fine-grained analysis in the second half of this chapter is my attempt to apply some of the distinctions they had made and, in particular, to apply their “principles of composition” and by doing so, to begin to critique this approach through the use of method, through the application of what is essentially a descriptive account of visual design, composition and framing.

A methodology that entails the ‘naming of the parts’, labelling each of the individual layout elements; establishing the communicative function of each of those individual visual elements; and to align them with the modes that are utilised; an analysis of this from the point of view of their meaning making potential, their function as “semiotic resources”. This last point on the facility

of semiotic resources, the signs in operation and their use is of particular importance and will be emphasised at relevant points during the remainder of the thesis.

Thus, theoretical ideas about the multimodal potential of composition in visually oriented texts such as the front pages of newspapers at the time became the chief focus of attention for the thesis and use the analysis of front pages to interrogate the methods used to establish composition as a system for the realisation of meaning. The focus upon composition was critical at this stage in the journey. The overall argument being that composition is an integrating principle; it is a system that organises content, it integrates individual elements to form a greater whole. It could also be argued that composition actually organises or integrates modes and, as such, forms the basis of a lot of what rests on the version of multimodality developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, especially in *Reading Images*.

At this stage in the research, it became important to find out, in the terms set out in the previous chapter, and as part of an ongoing critique of semiotics, to establish the role that composition has in the realisation of meaning and the function of framing in this argument about composition in relation to more general concerns about visibility and framing. In the light of what follows, examples are taken from the history of painting, as well as what was discussed in relation to multimodality in the previous chapter where it was established that, first that all communication occurs as text (Kress, 2003:47), second, that all texts are by their very nature multimodal, always deploying more than a single mode for the realisation of meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998: 186). It should be clear from the outset that paintings are multimodal texts in and of themselves. But this gives rise to a distinctive problematic in analysis, one that tends to support the fact that it is all too easy to make judgments about texts that fall into the trap of visual predominance or an over determination and an automatic overemphasis of the visual. Painting, however, given its apparent two dimensional surface and its abundance of visual and iconic signs, means that it is all too easy to ignore the potential of other modes being present in the communication.

Take the simple act of scanning a painting, as the viewer looks at the object, they are not still. The act of browsing over the contents of the image is done, at the very least by moving the eye, if not the whole of the viewer's body and in itself should be enough to prove that painting is more than just a visual medium. Both the motion of the body and the utilisation of space in this simple example give rise to other modes through which meaning is established. Added to this is the way that the viewer is positioned in space in the presence of the object, the painting. This is particularly the case when it comes to composition and framing, as we shall see in subsequent analyses. Both of these phenomena, scanning and the orientation of the viewer involve the motion of the body. Both of which, it will be seen, in both this chapter and later on, composition governs these highly physical, affective, or kinaesthetic potentials on the text. *La Primavera*, for example, is not just an object intended to be received aesthetically or as part of a purely visual dialogue. As will be seen in the analysis that follows, it is also a narrative, in many respects it is a highly crafted piece of storytelling, which in fact gives rise to much of its continued interest to contemporary observers, art historians, iconographers and, as we shall see, much art historical writing has been taken up attempting to decode the painting's narrative component. Granted, the most immediate signs on display here are visual. But isn't that the nature of iconic signs, with their apparent immediacy and transparency? But there are still other modes at play in visual texts and images such as paintings. Receiving information through the visual channel can also be seen to be tactile phenomenon. For example, texture plays an important role in paintings, even photographs of paintings used as illustrations in books have a material surface and as such we are able to touch them. Many of these cues may be visual in origin, but the meaning is established through both the motion of the body, the use of space, and appeal to senses other than vision, for example, touch. More to the point, when establishing what might be presented as some important first principles when it comes to establishing the meaning making potential of both framing and composition, the analysis of paintings, as well as gaining insights from some art historical writers, should shed some useful light on our topic, that will subsequently lead us into

the analysis of newspaper front pages as well as some similar structures to be found on the web.

The Compositional Attitude in contemporary semiotics

A key example from the early genealogy of the type of semiotics exemplified by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996 and 1998) and the potential of a semiotics of images (O'Toole, 1994: 3-31) was introduced at the end of the previous chapter and this alluded to some difficulties about this concept of reading order in multimodal texts. Assumptions had been made about the structure and conventions of writing being directed in a particular sequence or order and how this was seen to determine structure in other forms of text; reading images in particular. This is an ideal counter example [Fig. 3.1], because, once decoded, and in particular once the iconography of this image is established (Dempsey, 1992: 20-49; Gombrich, 1945: 7-60), it becomes clear that this image is to be "read" from right to left and in the opposite direction to the reading order of writing or print and Kress and van Leeuwen's characterisation of framing and reading order (ibid.).

In addition, this issue of meaning thrown up by the iconography of the image is such that the composition and spatial arrangement of the image becomes one of a complex set of relations do with the interpretation of each of the individual elements within the painting. Not the other way around. In fact, O'Toole is unhelpfully dismissive about art historical approach but these are exactly what is required to establish a relevant and workable semiotics of this image and he is not up front about the extent to which he has relied upon interpretations of this image from an art historical standpoint.



Figure 3.1. Botticelli's *La Primavera* c. 1482, Uffizi Gallery, Florence (203cm x 314cm), Tempera on Panel.

The composition of this painting does not conform to the same constraints as many other forms of text do. In this example it will be seen that there are many compositional devices that determine the reading path and sequence of interpretation of the image that in fact contradicts some of the judgments made by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 218-222) in relation to multimodal and, so called “composite texts”. A detailed discussion of this painting and its place in establishing a social semiotic of visual media will be taken up in a subsequent section of this chapter. This chapter, therefore, is about composition in the sense that, as a set of “semiotic resources” it forms an essential part of how semiotics from the point of view of Systemic Functionalism Linguistics (SFL) deals with the interpretation of the visual design of many types of communicative artefact, including key paintings in the history of art such as the one above.

In this context composition manages much of the multimodal aspects of texts though, in the first instance, the systematic ordering of elements within the text and the meanings that they carry. Composition forms a central part of the work presented by Kress and van Leeuwen who devote an entire chapter to the multimodal qualities inherent in the composition of many kind

of text (1996: chapter 6). O'Toole makes it a major part of his "functional analysis" of a range of different artforms (1994: chapter 1 and 1995: 159-181) - O'Toole deals for the most part with painting, sculpture and architecture in his incorporation of SFL into the formal and representational aspects of these art forms. However, Kress and van Leeuwen apply these theoretical distinctions not only to single images but also "to composite visuals, visuals which combine text and image and perhaps other graphical elements, be it on a page or on a computer screen" (1996: 183) indicating that the types of comparison available – that between the visual design of print-based and electronically-mediated texts, for example – but this is not exclusive in that composition can account for the spatial properties of many different types of text and the cues that arise as a consequence of their use.

Multimodal texts of many forms can be considered in the light of their compositional qualities, for example, the location and position of individual elements, the relationship between these individual elements and others in the composition, and ultimately the way that an entire text is structured and how it is composed. These are all issues associated with framing which is also a multimodal principle that determines, amongst other things, the spatial qualities of the text, its composition, whilst also managing the rules of engagement, so to speak. Here though, within the kind of semiotic approaches dealt with in this chapter, there is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the internal framing of objects and elements in the texts and the way that that discourse – the content of the image and its capacity to generate meanings – on the other hand, is in a sense packaged for consumption by viewers. In particular, the way that visuals and composition especially can orient the position and physical location of the viewer in space and thereby adding another important dimension to how we characterise framing and composition.

The argument in this chapter, therefore, is that the theory of framing in multimodal texts does, in the first instance, provide a very necessary and critical tool to facilitate a descriptive and comparative framework for the analysis of a wide range of multimodal texts. However, in the way that type of

semiotics reviewed here, the characterisation of framing is inadequate and does not give rise to the true interpretative potential of framing in the visual design of texts. Furthermore, that there is not enough evidence provided within the body of theory exemplified by either O'Toole or Kress and van Leeuwen to indicate that these structures are enough to for a general theory of multimodal communication, or indeed enough to support "grammar of visual design". But to position framing as an executive structure, as both a boundary and as a set of spatial constraints within these boundaries will, I argue, begin to resolve this.

Framing is a key part of the visual design of texts and figures prominently as an internal spatial structure in images determining features like the grouping together or separation of items of content, the connection and disconnection of key elements in the composition, the use of lines and borders that all create critical cues and the ordering of messages in the text (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 203). Framing is as system of representational conventions in visual communication and as such applies directly to the design of integrated multimodal texts. This suggests that there are certain rules governing their use and governing the communicative aspects, or guiding principles in the design of multimodal texts - at least this is the case if we are in the business of establishing a "grammar of visual design". Some of the structures that are evident in artforms such as painting [Fig. 3.2] exemplify the use of framing, space and composition as a "semiotic resource", but these structures can occur in many different kinds of text. Framing is multidimensional in the sense that it not only can account for spatial, qualities in two dimensions – it can also account for the temporal sequencing of messages – this occurs in visual representations as well as in music or indeed in film (Allen and Goodall, 2007). The point being that framing is critical to the timing of messages and their sequencing.

What follows then is partly a critique of composition in two different approaches to composition and framing. The first of these is in Michael O'Toole's *The Language of Displayed Art* (1994), in which he develops three, so called "functions" –representational, modal and compositional that map

onto Halliday's initial formulation, all associated with the communicative aspects of painting, in the first instance, and other modes of "displayed art" investigated throughout the book. O'Toole's functional analysis of visual structures like composition marks a key moment in the development of the argument in social semiotics that from the point of view of the communicative function of visual forms of multimodal texts, like paintings and other forms, the organisation of space is part of the way by which that meaning is created. However, there is a contradiction in how framing is dealt with here. In many respects O'Toole's work (1994) forms an important background to subsequent work by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001) and is the second account of framing to be analysed here in their development of composition to cover the structural organisation of images and other forms of multimodal communication (graphics, illustrated texts, pages from newspapers and magazines, film etc.). In their version of semiotics they have established three "principles of composition" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 177) in which framing has an important role in the realization of meaning both as a distinctive compositional principle and as a system governing the meaning of multimodal texts in general. Both approaches to composition are inspired by Systemic Functional Linguistics.

In the terms set out here then, composition amounts initially to the structural organization of individual elements and groups of elements within the greater whole of a complete text. This is important in the sense that the term implies that there is a sense of structural unity or coherence in the text and that this is established through the arrangement of forms occurring inside of the physical and spatial boundary of the frame, similar to that in painting (Fig. 3. 2) whereby the frame is real physical structure and one that determines or constrains the relations between all of the elements within the image. The example here, the painting by Mondrian, is a straightforward example of how the internal spatial within the image are directly impacted by the physical boundaries of the frame. Though, somewhat paradoxically, the frame itself is almost invisible, it is read by the viewer and is therefore present, but its appearance is only implicit. In addition, some of the coloured zones in the image, through lack of a clear boundary, appear to inhabit or at least imply

areas beyond the frame. Further, within the composition, dynamic relations between elements within the image, due to their location, size and proximity to other elements. This sense of an external boundary exists in other texts such as the outside margins of a page of text where white space performs the function of the frame and performs the same function as the physical frame around an image. The coherence of a text in visual terms is partially determined by its composition and therefore, by the relationship of specific elements to the whole.

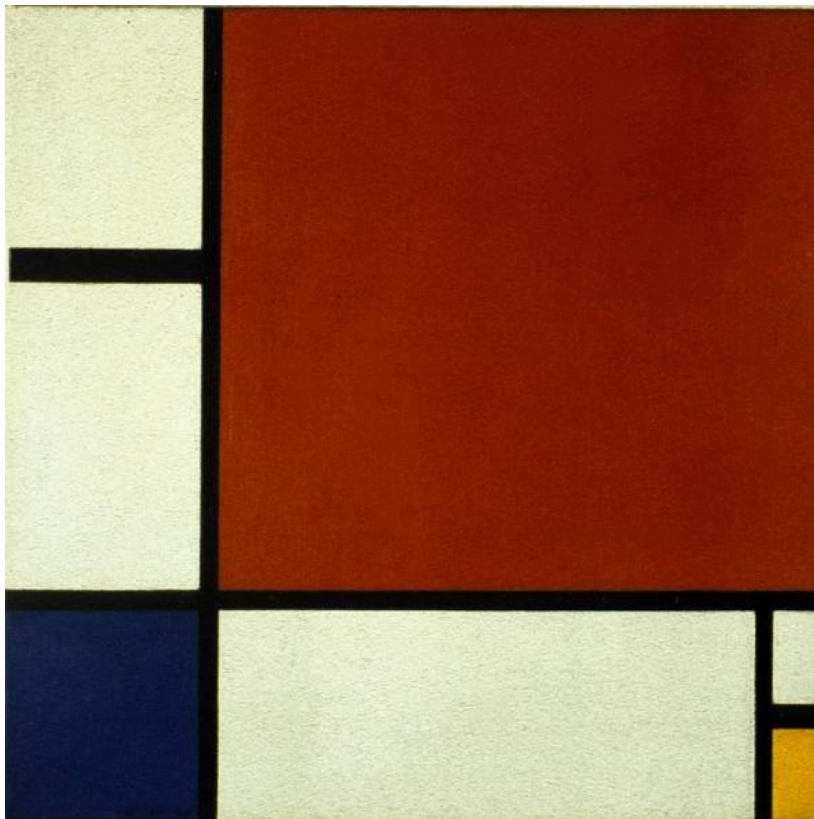


Fig 3.2. Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930

Inspired by Halliday's "Functional Semiotics" (1978) 1) Interpersonal 2) Experiential 3) Textual Functions, O'Toole (1994) has developed three functions associated to the semiotics and meaning making potential of painting and by doing so, professes to "build up a map of the language of painting illustrated with examples from Botticelli's *La Primavera*". Looking specifically at the visual design of multimodal texts, have made reference to a specific modality relating to composition or "compositional modality" which

thus, implicitly, places great significance on the spatial arrangement in images and many other forms of multimodal text referring specifically to the analysis of images, and painting in particular

O'Toole wrote that the "Compositional Function" in painting indicates aspect of the composition whereby:

[...] certain decisions about the arrangement of forms in the pictorial space, about line and rhythm and colour relationships, have been made by the artists in order to convey more effectively and more memorably the represented subject and to make for a more dynamic modal relation with the viewer (1994:22).

The frame in this context is a container for content and is bounded by the outer edge of the painting. Once this is established, all other content – elements within the composition (figures) – placed within the frame's boundary is seen as being in relation to this outer border. It will be seen that in many respects this framing creates a greater set of compositional constraints on the spatial organisation of content than either O'Toole (1994: 23) or Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 177) acknowledge in their accounts of framing and composition.

A central component of O'Toole's semiotic analysis of painting lies in what he calls the "modal function" and the "modal relations" (O'Toole: 1994, 5-12) that arise in consequence of these. Modal relations are a system of visual cues that occur between the image and the viewer, in part determining what might simply be called the rules of engagement. These rules of engagement constitute specific cues for the viewer contained within the image. The outer frame and the border being one of these – in Arnheim's terms, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter this executive structure says to the viewer that this frame and surface and all of the details contained within it are to be treated as separate from its surroundings, separate from its context. It also says to the viewer that they should pay particular attention to the content contained within the frame. Content within the frame is then subdivided into

sections or “episodes” (O’Toole, 1994) indicating one of the key ways in which the viewer will interact with the content and the means by which the content becomes intelligible, as in the realization of meaning.

These are established through the organisation and structure of graphical elements in the multimodal aspects of the texts in question. The modal function, as a system of relationships, organises aspects of the interaction between what is represented in the image, in the way that it is presented visually, and how the structure and organization of the text is realized by the viewer. Whilst aspects of the composition of the painting do give rise to these cues, interestingly, composition itself is considered by O’Toole to be a separate function or system within visual representations such as painting.

A Semiotic Analysis of Botticelli’s *La Primavera*

It would be tempting at this point to spend the rest of this entire chapter, as does O’Toole (1994), developing a detailed semiotic analysis of Botticelli’s *La Primavera* [Fig 3.1]. However, this would not be the point; the purpose here, given the privileged place that this semiotic approach inhabits in the genealogy of *Reading Images*, is to isolate important aspect of the semiotics of this image that occurs as anachronistic in the light of what I have so far said about framing. For example, within the modal function there are specific elements such as the gaze established by the identification of certain of the figures in the painting and particularly the direct address given in the figure of Venus, or indeed the many gestures articulated by the hands in each of the groups of figures in *Primavera*. Or, as stated, the fact that this image is meant to be *read* from right to left. All features of this image that addresses the viewer in a specific way and appeal to the viewer to attend to the content of the painting in a particular way, from a perspective: a mode of interpretation.

O’Toole’s account of *La Primavera* is detailed and exhaustive to say the least; as Keefer (1996: 304-6) has pointed out, there is a lot here that might

confuse interpretation rather than elucidate this complex image. In addition, O'Toole's account relies entirely on the many iconographic interpretations that have been applied to this painting (Gombrich, 1945; Wind 1958; Dempsey, 1992) all of which provide clues and sources to facilitate the decoding of this complex allegorical painting.

The "compositional function" (22-31) here, it is suggested, is indicating to the viewer a particular style of approach, a mood, or point of view, or the articulation of a particular kind of tone in the communication. We might say, as does O'Toole, of a painting such as Botticelli's *La Primavera* that it gives off a mood a sense of "grace" or "balance" (7) Many of the compositional devices used in this painting do in fact suggest a sense of rhythm, balance and potentially the combination of a set of harmonic relationships (27): either between different elements in the image – such as the dancing figures of the three graces - or the use of compositional lines that undulate across the horizontal plane of the image - the sky undulating in the background behind the trees, or the curve of sky and silhouetted olive branches circling around the head of Venus.

One of the key problems with O'Toole's social semiotic approach to this painting is that it tends to reduce the role of many these important compositional devices in the image and does this on two counts. Firstly, composition is exactly the way that the, so called "modal relations" are invoked. This is a fundamental way in which framing works. Think here of the ways that the relation with the viewer, the position of the subject, is set up. For example, through this *framing function* of the gaze of the figure Venus. And, prior to this, is the frame of the image itself, its orientation and dimensions providing the ground upon which interpretation can actually begin and on which it is oriented. Here as with all paintings the viewer is oriented in front of the image and there are compositional devices that are used to make this happen. The *framing function* of the image itself is a key to these modal relations that O'Toole remarks upon (1994: 5-12) and it is this that indicates how the image is to be approached by the viewer. Secondly, framing is made subservient to composition in the sense that framing is a

feature within both the "modal function" and "compositional function" in O'Toole's analysis. But, as the above example suggests there is a far more executive function for framing to perform in painting.

As suggested by O'Toole, many of the compositional devices suggest a sense of rhythm, harmony and harmonic relationships. This occurs either between individual elements - such as the dancing figures of the three graces, or compositional lines that undulate across the horizontal plane of the image. The sky in the background, for example, interlaced between the line of trees, or the curve of the sky around the head of Venus.

The painting is rectangular. This may seem rather obvious, but it is exactly these transparent aspects of the image that betray the reality of its interpretation. The orientation of the image is an important constraint leading to a predominantly horizontally oriented compositional structure. In addition, the transparency of the frame's structure as a boundary distinguishes the content of the image from its surroundings. It separates it from its context. By doing so the image makes an appeal to the reality of the viewer (Arnheim, 1982: 53). The frame as an outer boundary also limits the content that it contains and gives rise to other important spatial constraints. First, we must consider the larger spatial units that the image can be divided into: vertically, there are a total of five spatial units of related or familial content each amounting to a single episode in the narrative, horizontally, there are two main layers, the line constructed by the trees in the background and the line of figures in the foreground. Thus, there is a rhythmical alignment of episodes and individual elements within them and the tress of the background providing a visual counterpoint to all of the action in the foreground.

So, if it is possible to separate the image into different episodes, this by rights should indicate that there is a sequence associated to the horizontal construction of the image and the composition here is indicating narrative and therefore a logic of interpretation. Each of these episodes depicts different aspects of spring and is represented symbolically through the

representation of various pagan and mythological figures. For example, the action begins far right, where the figure of Chloris is being transformed - as a consequence of being raped by Zephyr - into Flora (the goddess of flowers). Zephyr is seen blowing a gust of wind into the garden of Venus from the East, indicating the East Wind - a signifying the coming of spring: as is the transformation into Flora. The figure of Venus is located just to the right of the centre her gaze is directed towards the viewer. Her head is framed by a series of concentric arcs that emphasise her position and salience within the composition as a whole. Cupid floats above Venus with bow and arrow poised for shooting. To the left is a group of three figures dancing – the three graces and further to the left, Mercury. Each of these episodes indicates important cues, cues that O'Toole would locate within his modal relations or as part of the modal function. For example, the passage of time implicit in the image's episodic structure, given that each episode is to be interpreted separately as a sequence of events along the horizontal plane of the painting. At this point – where separate spatial units indicate separate episodes within the image – framing is to do with the ordering and timing of messages, similar in many respects to the cut in film (Deleuze, 1986: 13).

To complete this section it is necessary to emphasise how O'Toole distinguishes framing both as a containing device for images as well as an open structure, one that extends beyond the boundaries of the image and that, in a sense, reaches out to the viewer:

The system termed frame has to do with how much of the represented subject has been included in the frame, and how much is left out, and also the degree to which it is contained within the frame, whereas many paintings have elements of the subject cut off by the frame (continuing, as it were, in the limbo beyond the frame) or, with more modern paintings, cutting across the frame, or altering it, or protruding beyond it in either two dimensions or three (outwards to the viewer) (O'Toole 1995: 168).

Then, the use of the gaze is a way of reaching out from the surface of the

painting to the viewer. In doing this the viewer is positioned in a relationship with the discourse of the image.

The role of gesture needs to be taken into account and the more affective relations that these give rise to. Similar to Venus' gaze, these details have a way of drawing the viewer in to the detail of the painting.

There are some important points here in relation to how this image has been interpreted by O'Toole that need to be addressed. First, although O'Toole acknowledges the debt to more conventional and art historical ways of analysing the symbolic content in the image, most notably the debt to iconography (Panofsky, 1972). He ignores the important fact that our reading of the image, our spatial relation in the face of it relies entirely on its symbolic structure – the interpretation of its spatial qualities and especially the right to left formula for reading the image relies sole on our knowledge of its symbolic structure.

Furthermore, as a consequence of the intricate symbolism of this painting there is a another crucial relation between image and text, between pictures and words, that has not been acknowledged or fully taken account of and this is the relation between the painting and the sources that have been employed in order to decipher its meaning.

This too, has implication in terms of framing. Content cannot exist without context. The manner in which the image has been interpreted is in fact one of the key modal operators here. Due to the image's symbolic structure – we cannot get very far without it.

In O'Toole's analysis of painting, these modal relations are intentionally created by artists and this is true also of graphic designers. It is their ability to manage such structures as page layout, typography, picture editing and composition, key elements in the design, which enables them intentionally to engage the reader in some quite specific ways. Clear examples of this are manifested on the front page of any broadsheet in simple elements such as the masthead and logo, which give cues about the institutional orientation of

the publication or about the structure and navigational properties of the text. Other key structures that contribute to the modal relations on front pages include the choice of a particular typeface for headlines and story copy, and the way that the photography is composed, edited and positioned on the page. The left to right orientation of patterns of reading forms one aspect of Kress and van Leeuwen's "principles of composition", the principle of "information value, where specific zones of multimodal texts manage the significance or value associated to areas of the text. Meaning produced by the spatial dimension.

Return briefly to the issue of semiotic resources. In the previous example we saw how certain aspects of the framing determined the composition of an image. These are all part of the semiotic resources to do with the spatial organisation of texts, those resources that the creator of such texts have ready to hand to convey meaning. I now want to see how this works in the system of composition developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images*. They devote an entire chapter to the multimodal qualities associated with composition.

Multimodality: “principles of composition”

O’Toole sees composition being a “function” and in terms of it being a system that manages modality and one that constrains the creator of visual texts such as paintings in order for the messages and meaning contained in the text to be realised. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996 and 1998) outline three “principles of composition” which are “information value, salience, and framing” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 183). These categories amount to something like organizing principles in composition with the arrangement of elements conforming to certain regularities and this is a critical aspect of their approach in that it begs the question as to whether these organising principles can legitimately be labelled a “grammar of visual design”, as used in the subtitle of their book.

Briefly, “information value” relates to the way that the location of elements within a composition “relate to each other and to the viewer” (1996: 177) and “endows them with the specific information values attached to the various zones of the image” (ibid.). In newspaper design, for example, various segments of the page can be used to serve specific functions. According to Kress and van Leeuwen analysis of front pages of consistently.

Salience relates to how aspects of the composition, size, contrast and tonal qualities in the image attract the attention of the viewer to specific elements within the image. Both of these aspects of composition are important and provide ways of analysing the relationship between some of the key spatial properties of texts together with the meanings that they convey, binding together visual structure (through systems like layout) with the creation and realization of meaning. What Kress and van Leeuwen say about framing is of central importance here, but, I argue, still confines framing to the internal compositional structures of texts, without reference to the external realities that the frame enforces upon the design of multimodal texts. They characterise framing in the following way:

The presence or absence of framing devices (realized by elements which create dividing lines, or by actual frame-lines) disconnects or connects elements of the image signifying that they belong or do not belong together in some sense. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 183)

In their analysis framing is applied specifically to images as a structure that is easily discernible in paintings, cinematography and photography where the frame is an explicit structure. However, the layout of pages in printed or electronically distributed texts can be seen to operate in exactly the same manner, as frame-lines are used as intentional ways of separating and dividing content into zones.

Kress and van Leeuwen make a further distinction within framing that is important here between framing as a system whereby elements within a composition is either connected or disconnected, as mentioned above. Framing is also a matter of “reading paths”, so called (1998: 205).

In densely printed pages of text, we suggest that reading is linear and strictly coded. Such pages are read, at least at a first reading, the way they are designed to be read: from left to right and from top to bottom, line by line.

(1998: 205)

But in later writing, framing is given a more substantial role:

Framing is a multimodal principle. There can be framing, not only between elements of a visual composition, but also between the bits of writing in a newspaper or magazine layout, between the people in an office, the seats in a train or restaurant [...] the dwellings in a suburb, etc. [...] time-based modes, moreover, ‘framing’ becomes ‘phrasing’ and is realised by the short pauses and discontinuities of various kinds (rhythmic, dynamic, etc.) which separate phrases of speech, of music and actors’ movements. We have here a common semiotic principle, though differently realised in different semiotic modes, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 3).

Whilst this is an acknowledgement of a more general application of framing, it is however, still limited to the internal structural organisation of the texts themselves. As discussed earlier in relation to the analysis of Botticelli's *La Primavera*, picture the frame around a painting in an art gallery is both a distinctive boundary around content whilst simultaneously being a container in which content is located or positioned. Frames in this sense are both external and internal structures combined. In addition, as will be developed in the following chapter, framing is also about context in the sense that it will indicate the structures of interpretation necessary in the realization of multimodal text. This is not just a matter of context *per se* as it gives rise to the possibility of establishing what cues outside of the structural organisation of multimodal texts give rise to their meaning and interpretation.

What framing does in relation to the composition of a complete and integrated text is to force a distinction between different zones in the image, or in our case, in the page of a printed text. In this manner, a further distinction emerges, namely between a form of framing that is internal to the system of composition in a text and a form of framing that has the potential to distinguish between different types of content at times to distinguish between modalities: between image and word, for example. Even in a newspaper front page, these elements that constitute different modalities are kept apart. This is done through framing. When, what Kress and van Leeuwen refer to as "strong framing" (1998: 203) is present in a text, then, I argue, this is a device that is frequently used to separate images from text and as such it frequently establishes important cues about modality and the relations between modes. The photograph accompanying a news story will usually be clearly marked and separated both by some kind of border as well as a channel of white space around the image separating it from the content that surrounds it. Thus framing occurs as an internal structure spatially organising elements on the surface of the image or page.

Thus, I have so far provided evidence that framing is a key structure and has the potential function as a paradigm within multimodal communication. In more general terms, however, as a system it is more significant than either

O'Toole and Kress and van Leeuwen in their respective and at times very similar approaches to composition, acknowledge. In terms of composition and in particular the way that pictorial space is organised, framing has an impact, as discussed in the previous section, on the timing and sequencing of messages.



Figure 7.1 Front page of the *Daily Mirror*

Fig 3.3 Illustration from Kress and van Leeuwen (1998: 191) *Daily Mirror* front page (Thursday March 11, 1993).

Here I want to begin to distinguish certain aspects of composition in the analysis of some front pages and to use, in the first instance, some examples from Kress and van Leeuwen (1998: 189-209).

In Kress and van Leeuwen (1996 and 1998) the authors observe in some front pages a bias towards left and right and suggest that this distinguishes content between “given and new” (1996:page; 1998:page).

Given, then, is the bad news: an instance of discord between lovers, with dramatic results. This is what we are exposed to day after day in press reports about everyday ‘private’ relationships: infidelity, break-ups, abuse. New is the good news, a story about a new (and therefore potentially problematic, not yet quite accepted) kind of relationship, that between a single mother and her child. (1998:190).

This, given and new relation, has been criticised more recently (Bateman and Delin, 2004: 67) for lack of empirical evidence or a corpus of possible examples to back this up –in Bateman. This relation and its ensuing explanation is treated as an example of “interpretative analysis” (66). Indeed, merely scanning the newsstands for the front pages of tabloids will yield just as many counter examples to disprove this.

Another dimension within their distinction of information value is that of top and bottom that apparently distinguishes between ideal and real in terms of the types of content represented in page layout (Kress and van Leeuwen: 1996: 193 – 202 and 1998: 193 – 195) and on the front pages of newspaper in particular. With newspaper stories this ideal and real orientation tend to be a permanent structure in the sense that a headline will provide executive information, compressed, “idealized”, and, ideological. In this spatial structure does occur in many texts but often for far more pragmatic reasons than Kress and van Leeuwen have stated. In the above example (Fig 3.3) this structure is clearly evident where there are news stories. In fact, the same could be said of the relation set up between the logo at the top left of the page and the rest of the paper. To take this example further distinguishing content in this way we can see that between top and bottom – above and below – there is given and new. The *Daily Mirror* masthead is given, represented in an identical way on every front page of the paper, and the information that is new is the news itself. So, in the light of this I am not

so sure that to distinguish the spatial characteristics of front pages in this way is not necessarily valid. Ultimately this questions the potential of these spatial structures their capacity to constitute what has been characterised by Kress and van Leeuwen as a grammar of visual design.

There are other ways in which composition associated with page layout can account for the bias towards different types of content to occupy different zones on the page. Similar structures such as “give and new” and “ideal and real” – can just as easily be interpreted in relation to the systematic ordering of information on the front page of a newspaper by combining the left to right orientation, indicated to the reader by the predominant reading path, with the upper and lower distinction – both proposed as part of Kress and van Leeuwen’s analysis in terms of “information value” then we can see another pattern emerging: a grid structure composed of static horizontal and vertical lines. In terms of page design, this is a key structure operating in the background of the design of any front page and it is this grid that forms a primary “semiotic resource” a structure upon which to organise and structure visual meaning (Hurlburt, 1978: 29-46).

To what extent does this relation constitute visual grammar? The way that Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish framing in compositional terms has some important consequences in terms of developing a core theory of multimodal communication that relates to framing and composition. The core theory that I am developing here and to be applied in the case study that follows in the next section has, so far been brought about as a consequence of a critical engagement with the work of both O’Toole and Kress and van Leeuwen and their treatment of context.

For example – let’s look at what Kress and van Leeuwen say about context in association with the framing of individual elements within a composition:

The stronger the framing, the more the elements in different frames are presented as separate unit of information. The context can then colour in the more precise nature of this separation. (1998: 203)

The problem here is that the authors do not go into any detail about the nature of context and this is really a missed opportunity when it comes to a discussion of framing – we shall see in the chapter that follows an important application of framing from the point of view of context. So, in this instance, whilst framing is dealt with here in specific terms and in relation to composition, it is not applied to this other semiotic dimension – context.

It is possible to conclude that the grouping or zoning of content elements and their location and proximity are a key part of this phenomenon of framing in composition. As a consequence it is crucial to recognise that this form of framing is a critical aspect in terms of composition of a wide range of multimodal texts.

Proximity: Bodies in Space

The grouping and clustering of elements and items of content in multimodal texts can also be related to spatial relations in the social world, whereby, a link can be made directly between the meaning associated with the design of content, say on newspaper front pages and actual physical relations between individuals. Proximity has some specific meanings that apply to both page layout and social relations, for example:

Non-closeness normally signifies weakness, indifference, or alienation in a relationship, either positive or negative. Closeness, however, signifies a strong relationship which can be either positive (love, intimacy) or negative (aggression, hostility). (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 52 and 53).

There is, therefore, a set of meanings that are carried by physical spatial relations, between bodies in space and in fact it was Edward Hall (1969) who first developed the concept of “proxemics” to describe how space is used to carry meaning in and to define the nature of social relations in physical space. Here the argument is that the same is just as true with the composition and framing of multimodal media texts. Space carries meaning

and the relative position of bodies in space marks out a specific set of relations and structured messages.

This can be related back to the discussion of *La Primavera* earlier on in the chapter (Fig 3.1). In this image we can see that, as discussed earlier, that proximity manages the sequencing and timing of the messages in the image, so long as we are aware of the right to left orientation of the composition and arrangement of each of the episodes. But there is more to this, there is also the management of spatial relations, first, those that determine the position of the viewer in relation to the image as a whole and then, as is being suggested here, the associations of closeness and distance that are generated by the spatial relations between elements, as stated, this is evident in the episodic structure of the narrative, Zephyr's hostile advances towards Flora and his violation of her, the grouping together, in contrast the grouping of the Three Graces as part of their dance, as well as all of the other figures, separate and going about their own parts of the narrative. Proximity is also encoded into the gestures of Venus and the Three Graces as invitations to the viewer to participate to literally take part themselves in the action represented in the image. The relations of foreground and background, establishing important depth cues, where Venus is seen to be set toward the rear of the image, prominent yet part of the background and the Three Graces and Flora and Zephyr to the front, both ways in which affective relations between ourselves and the image and our relations to these figures and their function in the action represented in the painting is established.

This is a crucial point in the development of the argument in this chapter and for the thesis as a whole. First, proximity is critical to the design and layout of multimodal texts and in all forms of visual text. In multimodal texts the concept of proximity can operate on a number of levels. In a printed text, such as the *Daily Mirror* example (Fig 3.3), it can work in two dimensions across the surface of the page to indicate the relations between items of content. Or second, in a film or piece of music, where the passage of time is indicated by the sequencing of passages in the text. This was seen in the

episodic structure of *La Primavera*. That is, the physical distance established from one scene to another or alternatively its closeness is used to indicate the relationship to time. Third, in a hypertext document, a different set of relations occur through proximity whereby, the connection of different documents that go together to form a distinctive reading path or navigation path.

In the first instance all of this relates to context. This is important because it is a way of moving from composition and framing as a system within composition, to look at framing in relation to other systems and processes. In this sense, proximity is where “context can then colour in the precise nature of this separation” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998: 52) that is performed by framing yet not fully articulated in their work on framing but here constitutes an important missing link to do with assumptions made about space in the image.

In multimodal texts the concept of proximity can operate in a number of ways. In a printed text it can indicate relations that work in two dimensions across the surface of a composition. In a film or a piece of music – a text where the passage of time is established in the composition of the text – proximity indicates the temporal sequence of scenes or passages – or in the episodic structure of a visual narrative such as *La Primavera*. The distance that is established from one scene to another or its closeness being indicated by the passage of time. In hypertext documents a different set of relations occur via the proximity of the connection of different documents or sections of documents that go together to form a reading path or navigation path.

The grouping of elements and details in any visual text becomes part of a set of structured messages and, therefore, part of the intentional structure of the text that is both articulated and realized through its composition. The grouping of elements indicates specific properties such as the relative importance of the information displayed, and as is often the case indicates a hierarchy of information that is signified through location and position, size and position in relation to other content elements. For example, there will

always be a hierarchy of information articulated on the pages of newspapers and this is realized through these spatial characteristics.

This final point is essential to the overall argument here regarding composition and the representation of space in multimodal texts - because, in the first instance, the spatial properties of texts and their framing relates to meta-communication – communication about the nature of the communication itself and the way that important cues about context are encoded into the text. In instances such as these, context and how the text is to be approached or interpreted by the reader, is given by the timing of messages that in turn determines the logic of interpretation, which contributes to the coherence of the text as a whole, or at least a logical sequence to the connections made between elements of the text.

It is through proximity that the actual physical presence of objects as part of the surface of the text is achieved. Not only is it a part of the intentional and communicative structure of the text, it is also a means by which the reader is oriented and is thus a performative component in the sense that the viewer – or reader in this case – is literally oriented in space. The text here determines the actual physical positioning of the reader.

All of these features amount to context in some way, either giving an indication of how to use the text or indicating ways in which the reader is oriented towards it. In this sense it is framed in a number of dimensions.

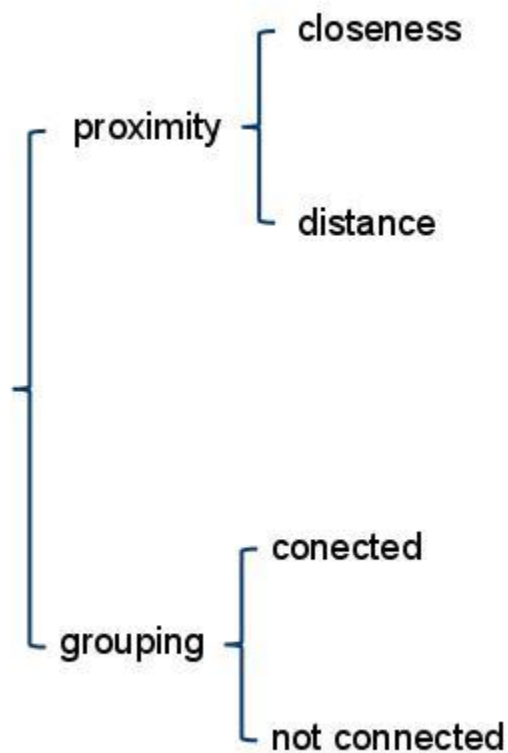


Fig. 3.4 Compositional Framing

The diagram brings together the system of framing from the point of view of composition that, whilst a useful tool in the analysis of multimodal texts, is still inadequate as a complete characterization of framing in multimodal texts. This “compositional attitude” as exemplified by O’Toole (1994) in the previous section and in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, chapter 6 in particular) has a tendency to reduce framing to a set of formal compositional elements; framing as a system within composition, rather than composition as a system within framing. This is a crucial distinction. Framing in social semiotics becomes a set of resources associated with composition. This in turn largely rests on the grouping of elements or figures into distinctive units and “proxemic relations” (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 52 and Hall 1966) that govern such properties as the closeness and distance between elements and figure and in terms of seeing that as potentially a set of grammatical structures, in part, determines the extent to which those elements are seen in a relation. One very important feature of this is that it

gives rise to the analysis of multimodal texts in a way that maps directly onto both the ideological meanings associated with space and with closeness and distance. But, as pointed out by Hodge and Kress (1988: 53) this relation is so variable it becomes an ambiguous relation. However, framing and space in this context becomes more than just a set of relation between elements. Indeed, the crucial issue here is the affective relations that are constructed between the viewer and the image.

System of Framing	Resources	Feature	Function
Compositional framing (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996)	Presence of absence of frames or framelines.	Grouping and separation Connection and disconnection	Zonal relations and Spatial relations Semantic connection Reading order
Modal Relations (O'Toole, 1986)	Point of view Focus of attention Gaze	Entry Points Navigation Paths	Area of interest Engagement Arousal
Proximity (Hodge and Kress, date)	Closeness and distance	Bodies in space	Affective relations (e.g. intimacy/hostility)

Fig. 3.5: The Compositional Attitude represented schematically.

So far in this chapter three distinctive forms of framing has been established, compositional frames (Kress and van Leeuwen), modal relations (O'Toole), proximity (Hodge and Kress). The compositional attitude in contemporary semiotics can, as indicated in the table above, can be reduced to three separate systems of framing. In fact, it would be more precise to represent framing here as a system of systems. Each system constitutes its own set of semiotic resources. Each feature with its own specific qualities or style of

appearance in the text and in turn will serve specific functions in the realization of meaning. This goes well beyond the function that framing was given in Kress and van Leeuwen's three "principles of composition". As a first step, then, these three systems can be integrated. In combination, each system of framing constitutes a set of semiotic resources mostly to do with the organization of space in images and integrated texts such as the examples presented so far. However, these systems are still only half of the equation, so to speak because they only account for the spatial organization of content (composition) and do not take account or make reference to specific contextual information (expectations) that are provided by spatial cues.

The Shape of the Page

In the previous chapter two versions of framing, composition and its impact on the structure of texts were identified. One, that spoke in terms of "modal relations" and how, amongst other properties, composition determines aspects of how we engage with the artefact. Another, that argued in terms of framing as part of a system of composition that emphasised the zoning of information whereby framing impacts upon the grouping of elements, their closeness and distance, and the relations of this in terms of the meanings generated and ultimately as part of a grammar of visuals. In this chapter and the case study that follows applies some of these distinctions and provides a critical account of them and it is argued here that the way that framing is characterised in both accounts is limited. In addition, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 1998) in their account of framing use many examples from the press, from printed artefacts that combine printed text with visuals. Whilst these examples seem to provide ample proof of their grammar of visuals, there is, however, some skepticism about how general these cases might be and, indeed, as is the case with the latter sections of this chapter, there is doubt as to the extent to which these distinctions will apply to other media beyond print and, in particular, to the web. Therefore, an analysis of web-based news is established that attempts to address these misgivings. The examples given in this chapter have been collected over a long period and

establishes part of a 'corpus-based' approach to research in this area (Bateman, J.D. & Henschel, R., 2004). In terms of a concrete methodology I have adopted some of the techniques indicated in the previous chapter in both the work of O'Toole and Kress and van Leeuwen as well as to work with each of the examples in terms of visual details and in particular the "distinctive feature analysis" (van Leeuwen, 2006: 147-150).

The spatial properties that structure the layout of a front page like those in the composition of painting; have the effect of orienting readers and engaging them in specific ways that indicate modes of interaction between the artefact and the reader as well as indicating a point of view or perspective. In essence, they serve to frame interaction at both the level of how to work with the text as a physical object as well as indicating how to interpret the material that is presented in the text. It is properties such as the shape and size of the artefact, and the visual structures of the page within its margins, that condition specific kinds of reading and interpretation of the text. This in turn provides a perspective or point of view and cues as to how to interact with the content. This is one direct way in which the designed spaces of an artefact can be seen to map onto the way that readers interpret texts.

Front pages of newspapers are multimodal media texts *par excellence*. This is exemplified by the amount of attention that has been paid to them by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 1998). Their multimodal qualities are manifested in the fact that they use both modalities of printed languages in combination with visual representation. There is more to this, as we shall see, but the two primary modes of word and image and the different levels at which this combination of modes occurs means that the front pages of newspapers make for ideal case study material, in investigating the way that composition, and in our case, page layout, typography and graphics work together to create meaning.

Their status of newspapers as media texts exists primarily as a result of the institutions that create them, the technology of their distribution and their material characteristics as communicative artefacts (Graddol 1994: 42) that

is, as pages from a specific form of publication with appropriate conventions and associations attached. As communicative artefacts they carry specific communicative intentions on the part of their authors. Therefore, as texts they function as part of a mediated process. They are mediated by technology, by the communicative intentions of their authors and by the institutional objectives of the organisations that they are associated with as well as through the institution of journalism and news gathering. In addition, they are also mediated by the needs and requirements of their consumption by readers.

The visual design of front pages plays a major role in this process and all of the individual design elements serve to support specific communicative functions in the process of disseminating the news. Through the analyses that follow a number of the multimodal properties of front pages will be exemplified including specific properties including: establishing the location of specific layout elements and the reasons for the choice in location in the organisation of meaning; it will establish whether the location of key layout elements, images, headlines, body copy. In addition framing, through the grouping of elements into distinctive zones and through proximity will be analysed in relation to values and ideas presented in the paper and how these are realised visually.



Fig 3.6. *USA Today*, front page April 5th 2005

Firstly, there are elements in the visual design and composition of all front pages whose function is to attract the attention of potential readers, good example of the notion of “modal relations” (O’Toole, 1994: 7). As news organisations compete for readers, newspapers are frequently situated in public spaces (shops, news-stands etc.) and many features of their front pages are intended to capture the attention of passers-by through visual means. These may include an ‘eye-grabbing’ photograph, the image of the Pope in the example opposite, or prominent and staccato headlines, as in “Tears for John Paul”. The masthead and the use of colourful *teasers* at the top of the page of many daily broadsheets, the *USA Today* logo sits alongside a teaser advertising a story on how North Carolina won a

basketball tournament and another relating to a Jane Fonda interview – both indicating content elsewhere in the paper. All of these elements have a specific function in relation to how they engage readers, for example, to attract attention, to encourage consumers to buy the paper in the first place, to indicate the subject matter of stories through headlines and teasers. Front pages, therefore, convey specific messages which are intended for specific audiences and to achieve specific effects, whether this is to tempt readers to buy the paper in the first place, or to draw them into the day's news or to invite them to read a specific item in greater depth later on. Thus, multimodal media texts such as front pages contain specific cues about how readers are to interact with the artefact itself. In particular they direct readers to specific aspects of the news and are presented in ways that encourage a certain type of reading: in performative terms they direct readers what to do with the text and in semiotic terms they explain how to create meaning from the text.

Fig 3.6 is a front page from the paper edition of the national American newspaper *USA Today* for Tuesday April 5th 2005. On the page as a whole there are a total of five photographs. The importance of the main photograph, the “Papal Procession” is established firstly by its size (it is the largest image on the page) and then by its central location relative to the other images on the page. (The other images are set either to the widest column on the left or on the right and therefore distributed on the periphery of the page.) To complete the prominence of this image is its direct semantic relationship to the main story on the front page with the headline “Tears for John Paul II”. The photograph is set above two stories forming a block of related content and taking up over half of the page. Below the “Tears for John Paul II” story there is another less prominent story with the headline “Mourners recall his personal touch”. All of this content, the photograph, its caption, and the two subsequent stories are enclosed in a box constructed with narrow frame lines and white space at the edges of the page.

The central image represents a section of the funeral procession for the Pope and merits further discussion. There are three main zones in the image: the pallbearers in the foreground, the body of the Pope, and the

crowd in the background. The pallbearers are in a formation and located at intervals alongside the Pope. This is a relatively formal grouping and the distance between each of them is worthy of note because this spacing is in direct contrast to the crowd in the background who are clustered together in a far less formal and arranged way. The horizontal aspect of the image represented by these zones is offset by the strong verticals of the pikes held by each of the pallbearers and both of these aspects tend to reinforce the grid-like structure of the composition of the page as a whole.

The grouping of details and elements in any visual text becomes part of a set of intentionally structured messages, as previously mentioned. Grouping indicates specific properties such as the relative importance of the information displayed. It also establishes whether there is a relation between elements, how those elements are connected and what the nature of the connection is. In addition, composition determines the extent to which these elements are framed and bound by context-specific information. Ultimately, this relates to the way that the text is to be interpreted by readers – “modal relations”. In the case of the photograph of the papal procession, for example, the clustering of elements in the image enables readers to distinguish between different classes of object and the participants in the image, between mourning members of the public in an informal grouping and the relative formality of the papal procession itself. In particular the spatial characteristics of the grouping of objects make reference to the way that the text is ordered into distinctive units. Therefore, the spatial relations inherent in the clustering or grouping together of elements in an image both contribute to and are impacted upon by the way that the image is framed. Grouping at this stage has an impact on another compositional feature and the episodic structure of the text and therefore in the order and timing of messages.

The same is true of the layout and spatial presentation of the rest of the page, in particular the cluster of content items, picture, headlines, straplines and body copy that relates to the topic of the Pope’s funeral. All of this content is grouped together and is thus represented as being related through this spatial connection. This also represents a hierarchy of content, with the

photograph taking prominence and the two stories taking progressively less priority on the page. In this way, “news hierarchies” are represented visually by means of the layout and composition of the page, due to their relative size and position on the page.

To the left of this central block of content is almost an entire column taken up with teasers and other indicators of content, index information, headline links to full stories and other graphics. Thus, the majority of content here actually refers to content elsewhere in the newspaper. A sports photograph of two basketball players in close combat is located at the top of the column. Unlike the main picture there is no accompanying story, only a reference to the sports pages inside this edition. The photograph is clustered together with the caption underneath it, a headline indicating “North Carolina’s victory”, a graphic for the NCAA Championship and a short description of their winning tie along with a simple red graphic square, referring readers to another section of paper (presumably the full story of the North Carolina team’s success). Although, this photograph is not the largest or the main front page photograph, it is set in a very prominent position, almost directly to the left of the *USA Today* logo and almost to the top of the page.

Within the composition as a whole, the spacing and positioning of elements into specific zones plays a significant role in the way that the composition works, especially with respect to the way that proximity functions in framing content and reader interaction with it. Specifically, all of the items in this zone of the page are related in some way and, thus, the principal function of proximity is to establish a connection and to maintain the stability of the connection between individual elements. The closer together items are in the composition the more likely they are to be interpreted as having associations with adjacent items. It can be said then that there is also a proxemic code that draws on closeness and distance for its realization so that all items clustered together are assumed to be in some relationship with each other. In this case, they are all relevant to the same topic, sports, and in particular to basketball and the winning of the national championships by the North Carolina team. This kind of structure within the overall composition involves

the clustering together of related items of information into distinctive zones and is determined by spatial cues which are controlled by either the closeness (connected) or distance (unconnected) relation between elements which is a dominant structure in proxemic coding.

This is one of the ways in which proximity is related to framing and is an important feature in documents like the front pages of newspapers. As we shall see, it becomes an even more critical structure in the framing and spatial organisation of content on web-based versions of front pages. What is established here is that related and context-dependent content are organised as a distinctive textual unit via the use of space and proximity. In this case, the entire top section of the left-hand column, which is devoted to similar content, is separated from the rest of the page by thin frame-lines that border both image and text along the vertical extent of the column boundary while horizontal lines are used to distinguish this from the rest of the content that fills up the rest of the left-hand column.

Kress and van Leeuwen use the term “participant” to refer to the elements within an image that are central to the action or to key elements in any narrative that is being represented. In the image of the two basketball players, the participants are represented in combat. The photograph in this section itself exhibits some important cues regarding proximity as a spatial property in composition, with particular respect to the relations that are established through the positioning of participants and their closeness or distance. In terms of proximity, the physical closeness of two bodies might indicate intimacy. Neither of the two players is touching the other, but the fact that one is attempting to keep possession of the ball and the other player struggling to gain possession of it places them in a close relationship. Conversely, they are separated by their association with a particular team which functions in the composition principally through the different colours of their shirts. However, the distinction of closeness and distance gives rise to something of a contradiction: the closeness of the participants suggests intimacy but these participants are in combat. Another code functions here to support the view that these are participants in an oppositional relationship.

Both players are in an active relation and their stretched and elongated bodies and the facial expression of the player in white suggest force. Kress and van Leeuwen would describe this relation as a vector as there is a strong line in the image which suggests force and tension. The relative size and position of these bodies is, therefore, another important cue which indicates certain power relations, namely that one of the participants is in a subordinate relation to the other. The North Carolina player in white is in the most prominent position, being represented as being above the other player in the combat. The name "North Carolina" is clearly visible which is not the case with the player from the opposing team. However, these two players still need to be distinguished clearly from one another which is done by the positioning of each combatant: the one who is in possession of the ball is in a superior stance, whilst the other is placed in a subordinate relation due to his lower positioning. This suggests another feature in the proxemic coding here, namely the relation of high and low, or above and below, and the cue here is that one participant is in a subordinate relation to the other.

The content is therefore framed in more than one manner. Firstly, framing is achieved through the clustering of related layout elements and of content. If the elements within the group are tightly clustered together then we can say that is an example of strong framing suggesting that all elements are closely related. Alternatively, if elements are loosely scattered then this would be weak framing (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998: 203). A second form of framing involves content being framed by subject matter and its relevance to this associated subject matter. Therefore its position on the page is context dependent via its relevance to a specific topic or event (in this case, basketball championships). Thirdly, framing is achieved through the actual use of frame-lines that follow the border of the left hand column vertically and via intersecting lines across the column horizontally. This is reinforced through the internal arrangement and composition of the central image and through the horizontal aspect of the headlines, as well as the way that the story copy reads horizontally from left to right.



Fig 3.7. *Daily Mirror* front page, 21st June 2005.

The *Daily Mirror* in its paper-based format is a tabloid newspaper (Fig. 3.6) the spatial cue here is the shape and size of the artefact as a whole. Within the genre of newspapers even a simple and apparently transparent structure like the shape and size of the artefact has an immediate impact on how it is interpreted, as it indicates a particular style of reporting, involving relatively informal content, appeals to sensationalism, allusions to popular culture and populism and a frequent preoccupation with celebrity. This contrasts with the relative seriousness and formality of a broadsheet newspaper. However, in the contemporary media environment this structure is beginning to break down, since some broadsheets, most notably *The Times* and *The Independent*, have opted for a tabloid format.

The front page is usually a complete textual unit which can always be easily distinguished from the other pages in the rest of the publication. The page can be subdivided into separate compositional units, which are thematic and context-driven but through visual design, all these textual units combine to form a whole page, meaning that there is integration and coherence in the

way that the page as a whole is composed. The whole page is a collection of separate units but due to the composition of its design, and the development of the page as a conventional structure, the tendency is to interpret it as whole and complete. No actual content extends beyond the page's boundaries, although this may be implied through the use of bleeds that infer that content is outside of the frame of the page boundaries. An example of the bleed into the margins is used in the photograph of Victoria Beckham in (Fig. 3.6) for rhetorical purposes. The text "Posh in Boots" operates as a punning title for the piece that it refers to and both her boots and head tend to bleed into the page's margins, thus emphasising these details and giving them added salience for readers whilst also indicating aspects of the story inside the main section of the newspaper.

The front page is essentially the first point of contact for readers and it must engage with them on this basis. It is the point of entry for all of the textual content in the daily edition and presents aspects of visual design that do not occur on other pages. Items on the front page frequently refer to content available elsewhere. In broadsheets, this content may be available in separate sections, as is the case with every edition of the *Guardian* which like all British broadsheets uses "teasers" (Fig. 3.7) for this purpose.



Fig 3.8. A teaser from *The Guardian*

In this edition of the *Mirror*, readers are invited to accept the offer of savings at *Boots* and are referred to elsewhere in the publication. These so-called "refers" have a spatial aspect in themselves and indicate depth of content by pointing inwards into the publication, like a hypertext document on a website is constructed out of links. These elements are fundamental to the way that readers are intended to interact with the publication as they ultimately

determine whether a potential reader will buy the paper in the first place. There is, of course, much more to reader choice than this in the highly competitive arena of newspapers. Since many potential readers will have made their choice prior to engaging with the front page many visual structures are there purely for the purposes of supporting a purchase, via elements such as “special offers” and the nature of the content to be found in the rest of the publication.

Whilst many of the elements on the front page refer to content elsewhere the impression still remains that all content is placed on the front page for a specific purpose. The *Boots* special offer, for example, functions to entice potential new readers through offering them a bargain, enticing them from other newspapers by means of this simple economic transaction. More extreme examples of this include offering free or inexpensive airline tickets. The so called “price wars” between news organisations are another area where economic advantage is used to entice readers to buy the publication. This translates into competitive advantage for the news organisation.

The rectangular surface of the printed page is another given or transparent structure but this is a complete and integrated unit or what Kress and van Leeuwen referred to as an “integrated text” (1996: 183). It is integrated as a consequence of two main aspects in the presentation of discourse: textual coherence and thematic unity. All content within the boundary of the page margins is therefore complete, like the frame around a picture. Although each of the elements within the composition can be seen as separate units in themselves, they all are placed within the page’s boundaries and thus integrated into the structure of the page as a whole. On a compositional level, the entire front page is a complete unit since as a visual structure the page is a singular textual structure in which all elements combine into an integrated whole. The page is also a complete textual unit made up of smaller textual units that are themselves composed of individual layout elements, type, photographic imagery and other graphics. The importance of the page as a complete textual unit occurs in many other forms of printed text. A newspaper front page is similar in that it can be treated as complete,

being a single item of discourse and a single artefact reflecting its authors' purposes. The spatial structure of the page as a whole, therefore, is part of the rhetoric of the text if only by virtue of the fact that this spatial structure serves to order its messages and has the potential, at least, to represent a hierarchy both spatially and visually. This is the case when a main story is presented on the front page as its salience and relative importance is indicated by its presence there.

The layout of the page is not necessarily a permanent spatial structure when their layout is considered over time. In the *Daily Mirror* example (Fig. 3.6) the page as a whole can be divided into four main spatial, and therefore, textual units, each of which is distinguished by means of framing. However, other editions of the *Mirror* from the same period have only two main panels, that in effect divide the page into only two horizontal blocks of content. However, this variation may, in fact, may be an important cue in itself for on the rare occasions when, according to the agenda set by news organisations, there appears to be only one major event to be recorded for the day, the entire front page may relate to this topic only and on these occasions a single photograph may occupy the front page. Examples include the death of Princess Diana, the bombing of the World Trade Centre, and the terrorist bombings in London. In each of these cases, the front pages of every national daily carried only a single item with usually a single photograph covering the whole of the front page and no actual text or narrative. On these occasions, the only cue distinguishing these publications is their logo or masthead. The framing of content here indicates the relative importance that these key events in the world bring with them with an additional appeal to the tragedies that lie behind them.

Knowledge about these events are a "given" in the same was as in Kress and van Leeuwen's observation about potential horizontal bias in the design of front pages. It is assumed that the reader already has knowledge of the event itself and the photograph is there to provide evidence as to the fundamental importance of these events in our daily lives. Without the usual text of a main story on the front page, much is assumed to be "given". This

“given” nature of some compositional structures in media texts is one of Kress and van Leeuwen’s central arguments (1996 and 1998) where they argue that at least in some publications, there are horizontal structures that display a bias towards presenting content on the left-hand of the page as “given” and content on the right as “new”. They argue that this is a consistent compositional structure across a wide variety of publications whereby information that is already assumed to be present in the mind of readers is presented on the left-hand side of the page, and new information that does not relate to any prior knowledge of the content appears on the right. However, as discussed here, there is more variation in the visual design and composition of the front page than this and that there are many other visual and spatial components that are treated as given by the reader. This, in fact, indicates the amount of prior knowledge and expectations that are an integral part of the reader’s interaction with the text and any information that is “given” will connect to a greater amount of prior knowledge than any information that is “given”.

As stated, in the example, the front page as a whole can be divided into four separate units, with each of these units in a relation to one another. This is indicated by their location, their size relative to other units and by other focal qualities presented by layout elements, including bold headlines and photography. Each unit engages readers in quite specific ways by providing specific cues. One graphical element that is always seen on the front page is the masthead that is placed against the top left margin of the page. It will always ordinarily appear in the same place, be given the same dimensions and weight on every edition and be accompanied by basic information such as the date and price of the publication. The masthead’s purpose relates largely to identification but it also indicates the institutional source and authority of the publication. In the case of the *Mirror*, It has a bold red border that bleeds across the rest of the page and frames other textual units such as the photograph of Victoria Beckham, the special offer from *Boots*, and the main story.

Below the masthead is the special offer and each element in this item, the type, the *Boots* logo and an array of consumer products are presented in an asymmetrical way that indicates informality in the composition. Below this is the main story for the day with the bold headlines “Home Steel Home”. This unit can be further broken down into separate layout elements: the headline, an opening line, the story copy, an accompanying photograph and its caption, including the “exclusive” label, with white type on a red background. All of these elements are framed by narrow black border. Beneath the headline is a strapline for the story underlined which reinforces the border at the foot of the page, “Call to put yob families in ‘container’ homes”.

There are two focal points to the story, the headline and the photograph, neither of which present the content of the story in an explicit manner, and only the strapline gives details about the nature of the story itself which is constructed from a series of individual elements. The function of the headline is to provide a focus of attention for the story and as such it acts as a key entry point to this section of the page for readers. The same is true of the accompanying photograph which provides visual interest and a further entry point into the story. The story copy is set within a narrow column - the only element on the page that is bounded by a column structure - and this is a relatively short piece of narrative text at the foot of the column that refers to a section inside the main body of the publication.

From Print to Web

On the *Daily Mirror* website, however, there are many spatial and visual structures that for a variety of reasons associated with the physical nature of the medium do not match those of the paper edition. What is argued here is that this also has an impact on the communicative function of the documents themselves, and in some cases they look very different in terms of their spatial structure and content is framed in different ways, all of this bring a consequence of the fact that the intentions that structure the page as a whole are different. Although much of the content is similar in the paper edition and

the website, for example story copy and some photographic imagery, the nature of the display in itself produces some real differences in how the content is laid out. This alteration in the structure and arrangement of content is due at least in part to the actual physical properties of the medium and the nature of the production of the text as hypertext and to a representational structure that functions in a different way from that used for paper-based copy.

It can still be said that the entire page is a complete textual unit but electronic documents do not have the same physical presence as the pages of paper documents and there are some dramatic ways in which hypertext documents cannot function in the same way as paper pages. It is merely a web convention that individual documents are called web *pages* as this is only a metaphorical representation of a hypertext document.

Due to the requirements of navigation, framing in the screen version has much more to do with access to content and navigation. Framing and the clustering together of content is done on the basis of themes when it comes to the presentation of news stories and features. The page as a whole functions more like an index on the website, listing content available elsewhere, content that is accessed through the hypertext system of the web, and the way this is utilised for the site. This feature is emphasised by the fact that a very high proportion of the space on the page, when clicked on, will navigate the reader to content elsewhere in the form of hyperlinks, either to content internal to the site or to the external sites indicated by advertising space.

The page as a whole is framed by margins that run into the browser window and then by a border that forms the margins of the page. However these are not equivalent structures to those of the paper edition. The clustering of related types of content is still an important feature of the page but the topics that these relate to are much broader and are arranged thematically. At the top of the left column, the widest of the three columns on the page, there are three distinctive blocks, all framed with a bold red border and a tab to the left

indicating a particular section, namely news, sport, 3am. This ordering of sections or themes is emphasised by the fact that the same sequence of links is repeated in the red navigation bar below the logo that is set against the top left margin. This navigation bar itself constructs a frame that creates a boundary between the content at the top of the page and all of the content in the main body. Content, in the form of complete stories, is much more fragmented which can also be put down to the nature of hypertext. In contrast to the paper edition, where there is only one main story on the front page, there are no complete stories here, only headlines, straplines or briefs leading to content elsewhere on the site.

Like the paper version, the webpage as a whole can be separated into smaller units but here there are more of separate units, in addition, they seem to be less determined by the actual nature and meaning of the content. In the main body there are three columns, for example, and in the left-hand column there are links to sections based on themes. Also, these structures are not as distinctive as those on the front page of the paper version in the sense that they are less distinguishable merely in term of their visual appearance and visual design. There are more zones altogether but there is less of a distinction in terms of framing between each of them, giving rise to:

- There is much less typographical variation, fewer font types, changes in size of type on the web than in print.
- Less hierarchical ordering of content on paper.
- More photographs distributed across entire page.
- Distinction of a page as a coherent unit is problematic and unstable.

In general terms what has been established in the previous sections is that both media forms support multiple entry points, but these are positioned and accessed in very different ways and ultimately serve very different functions.

The clustering and proximity of elements is also very different across both media and serves different functions. In print there is far greater thematic unity and textual coherence but fewer topics are referred to. Conversely, on the web much more content is referred to, but there are no complete stories as these are available to readers elsewhere. There are, therefore, important questions concerning the integrity of the visual design across both media. These issues, it is argued, are largely to do with the requirements of navigation and the structure of information across the two platforms. In print, there is much more by way of contextual information. These aspects of the structure and design of texts indicate different approaches to the use of space in multimodal text

Framing: Beyond Composition

The impact that framing as a compositional structure has on the visual design, layout and spatial properties of media texts is considerable, especially if seen in the light of what has been discussed in the previous sections, with modal relations determining both interaction and the proximic codes that occur within composition. However, it is argued that framing has a far greater impact than either O'Toole or Kress and van Leeuwen allowed for in their respective analyses of composition. Framing is too often seen as part of the internal structure of composition, rather than as an external boundary that impacts on the expressive potential of composition in the visual design of multimodal media texts.

In the next chapter the issue of how contextual cues are maintained by framing will be considered in some depth. This illustrates a further problematic aspect of the purely semiotic approach to the way that media texts are framed, namely the tendency to negate the context in which artefacts and representations themselves are received, as a set of social or cognitive associations adding to interpretation. It is interesting to note that Kress and van Leeuwen do make note of the impact of context in relation in their distinction between strong and weak framing, which in itself is a useful concept: "The stronger the framing of an element the more it is presented as

a separate unit of information. Context then colours in the more precise nature of this ‘separation’” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998: 203) chimes well with the current argument about the proximity of various layout element and the impact that this has on the way that texts are read, as seen in the *USA Today* example. However, they do not go on to discuss the nature of context either in terms of how it works to support a particular stance or point of view, say as an extension of modal relations, or a more detailed view of the social perimeters surrounding the consumption of images. The application of framing in its contextual form thus becomes even more significant and forms the theme of the chapter that follows.

In Kress and van Leeuwen’s analysis (1998) of newspapers more is said about framing and the way that readers interact with these texts. Firstly, they reinforce the notion that framing is partly about the way that individual content elements are related, whether these are connected or disconnected. Then they argue that newspaper front pages tend to support what is known as a non-linear approach to how they are read and processed as media texts, that is to say that a text like a newspaper will support multiple entry points. This, it is argued, is something that fits the way that modal relations function in the text and is a critical and vital expression of them, guiding the reader to salient content. However there is a lack of depth in what Kress and van Leeuwen have presented in their own analysis of newspaper front pages (1996, 1998) since their discussion lacks the support of empirical evidence and makes no reference to context outside of the compositional properties of the texts in question. Like O’Toole’s systemic method, this is typical of the analysis of texts from a multimodal perspective.

Unlike their print-based counterparts, the homepages of the many national daily newspapers are organised more like lists or indexes to content elsewhere on the website, presenting few complete and integrated stories at the top level. This is a major distinction between these two types of media texts, since there is far greater textual and discursive coherence on the printed front page and, in many instances, this and its internal compositional

structures can be treated as a single complete and integrated composition. This is not the case with alternative forms of presentation on the web.

Composition is context-driven and one of those contexts is the communicative intentions that inform the visual design of these texts. It is argued in this research that if the communicative intention of each of these forms of text is different, then it must be assumed that the context in which they are consumed will also be different. As seen in the previous examples individual elements are clustered together and grouped into areas of related content. The closer individual elements are to each other, the more this will be interpreted as a relation with other content elements. Thus the *USA Today* home page (Fig. 2.3) presents content in a topic-oriented way and is assumed that content is clustered together in a systematic way. Comments like “this homepage shows admirable restraint in promoting only top stories rather than trying to be comprehensive at this top level” (Nielsen, 2002) have been applied to the design of the *USA Today* website but it has to be said that the same argument about the comprehensiveness of the presentation of news stories would never be levelled at the paper-based edition. Only a subset of the day’s top stories would appear on the front page and, as later examples from the *Daily Mirror* show, tabloids only place a small number of stories on their front page, leaving the reader to peruse the rest of the paper for more news. Content elsewhere in paper-based editions is indicated by “teasers” in prominent locations on the front page. Thus, it would appear that clustering of related items of content functions differently on the front pages of paper-based and web-based newspapers.

To counter some of the difficulties inherent in descriptive accounts of media texts, especially those of a compositional persuasion including for example, it is necessary to develop more empirical tools for the critical analysis of multimodal texts. On the one hand, this provides a much needed contribution to the debate on the most appropriate tools for this style of analysis from the point of view of empirical validity in particular on the application of so called, corpus-based approaches, on the other, applying these techniques to more general approaches that go under the heading of “Critical Discourse

Analysis” albeit with an emphasis on the visual or pictorial rather than on the linguistic and textual, as has ordinarily been the case.

The application of framing as a critical tool has been extended from existing accounts of paper-based media, and newspaper front pages in particular, to account for the visual design, spatial and compositional properties of similar or equivalent documents distributed electronically. There is now a need to develop analytical tools that adequately account for these kinds of transformation in the structure and organisation of content. The vast majorities of national daily newspapers over recent years have tended to publish similar textual content in both paper-based and online versions and, as such, are ripe for the kind of comparative survey of the type investigated in this case study which highlights the progressive differentiation of these two forms of media products.

On a theoretical level, it has been argued that the concept of framing should be developed beyond that proposed by previous research in contemporary social semiotics which tends to locate framing within the composition of texts and the spatial arrangement of elements within the composition. Here the intention is to place a much greater emphasis on framing as a contextual device that makes reference to the communicative intentions of the press organisations that distribute these products and the expressive resources employed by the designers and authors of the texts in question. Thus the way that key compositional and spatial structures are used to organise content is analysed in reference to the expectations and the kinds of prior knowledge and assumptions that readers apply to such texts is introduced here, as part of a general strategy for the analysis of media texts which is dealt with in depth in the chapter that follows.

Therefore framing in media texts should be seen from two complementary perspectives: as a graphical structure that places boundaries around content and as a way of supporting contextual cues in the realization of media texts. But framing also allows us to investigate the expressive potential of visual and spatial structures from both sides of the media equation, that is how

framing is employed as an expressive resource by authors and producers in concrete representational structures, and also how those visual structures engage the text's audience and make reference to their expectations which are ultimately cognitive structures formed by *priori* knowledge and assumptions. The distinction that Kress and van Leeuwen make in relation to one of their three "principles of composition", in particular the relation of "given and new" is a case in point, since the interpretation of many visual structures is transparent and therefore assumed to be "given". However we cannot fully account for this property without also making reference to the expectations and prior knowledge of readers and to a much more detailed understanding of the context of interpretation with reference to key cognitive structures. Carey Jewitt has noted that:

Kress and van Leeuwen's method of visual analysis provides essentially a descriptive framework. For this reason it does not, on its own, offer all that is needed for the sociological interpretation of image. (Jewitt, 2001: 154)

Whilst it is not necessarily a wholly sociological approach that is being sought here, it is argued that the compositional approach is only one dimension of a fully integrated approach to media texts from a multimodal perspective. What is missing is an appropriate emphasis on context, especially in relation to the application of framing since a frame is a system of references that has been established as part of the communicative and social context of the texts under scrutiny. Therefore, part of the agenda here is to perform an analysis that is bound to context. This analysis must not only follow the direction of compositional analysis but also go beyond this to address aspects of the context in which these texts are received. This will include mapping spatial cues in the text's design onto actual assumptions made by readers about the nature of their interaction with the texts in question. The analysis that follows focuses on composition and the following chapter brings in tools that can be used to identify some of the assumptions that readers apply to their interaction with media texts, based on their expectations.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) programme in establishing the multimodal nature of all discursive practices seems to be based on two criteria: the identification of semiotic resources and their location within communicative practices. This can be seen in the treatment of framing as a means by which the connection or disconnection of elements in a multimodal text acts both as a semiotic resource and also has a specific function within a system of representation, establishing a connection between elements and producing a thematic or a context-driven relationship. This is interesting in relation to the *USA Today* webpage example because it is only the lead story, with the headline "Rescue pilot errors prove fatal", and the main photograph of a helicopter that are linked in terms of story content and related elements sharing this thematic connection. In contrast, the elements in the "Latest headlines" section are all connected spatially but are unconnected thematically. This needs to be accounted for in terms of the function of each element, the headlines in particular. There is a marked contrast, therefore, between the headlines on the front pages of paper-based and web-based newspapers. This is due to the extended function of headlines in terms of navigation as well as the structure of the online documents in the electronic context being somewhat different to those in print. At this level of composition it must be noted that Kress and van Leeuwen's version of composition and framing cannot take account of these differences or the actual function of an element such as a headline.

Conclusion

To what extent has the material presented in this chapter answered the questions set out at the beginning of it? When the majority of the analysis was undertaken for the preparation of this chapter the approach taken by Kress and van Leeuwen in relation to composition and multimodality seemed relatively watertight. On the basis of the analysis undergone in previous section the following conclusions are drawn in terms of strengths and weaknesses of their approach.

One of the most powerful aspects of the methodology used by Kress and van Leeuwen in relation to the visual design of newspaper front pages was its ability to capture the meaning making potential of individual elements in a composition. Semiotic resources work well on the basis of their communicative potential but seemingly only as individual elements. In addition, it is possible to make inventories of semiotic resources on the basis of their communicative function and the modes to which they belong. The empirical analysis undertaken in the central sections of the chapter bears this out. As a consequence, two especially powerful structures have been identified that come out of this analysis of the compositional methods used by both Kress and van Leeuwen as well as O'Toole, these are as follows. First, modal relations govern the interactive elements of the work and of the composition that gives rise to it. There is a point here where the discussion of modal relations begins looks quite similar to some issues in art historical writing relating to the positioning of the subject, the viewer (see, for example, Foucault's discussion of *Las Maninas*, 1974: 3 – 16) in relation to the work. One of the properties that paintings frame is the actual position and location of the viewer and orienting the viewer in relation to the content. This is also true of the modal relations that we have seen in this chapter and is developed further in the penultimate chapter of the thesis. This leads to one very important aspect of how we can now use this concept of semiotic resources as they contribute to modal relations as a form or means of access or an approach to the text that is already encoded into it. This is a form of framing and it is a way of bringing important contextual cues into the discussion. Second, the importance of "proxemic coding" has been established, whereby the closeness and distance of elements and groups of elements have a direct impact on the way that content is interpreted. Both of these structures indicate, or at least hint at, the importance of context, whilst not actually naming it so. In fact, this in turn leads to one of the main criticisms of Kress and van Leewuen's approach to composition in that there seems to be a lack of awareness of the role played by context in the interpretation of media texts.

It is still much less certain the extent to which this style of analysis can be applied to some of the larger structures that composition, and framing, signify. For example, in the overall design of media texts, there are points where the composition becomes a complete singular unit of meaning or discourse, such as a whole painting or complete page of a text. As seen in the previous set of examples, the boundaries of the page of a newspaper can itself act as a semiotic resource, it carries its own meaning, yet it is also a frame, it is a boundary around content. A boundary, moreover, that both limits the meanings of the content, whilst simultaneously making reference to content that is outside of the frame (Deleuze, 1986: 17).

A consideration of the relationship between the theory of communication that the style of analysis is derived from and the actual methods used leads on to one of the major criticisms of this methodology and both echoes and substantiates the objections made by Forceville (1999) in his review not long after the publication of *Reading Images*. The question still remains as to the extent to which this style of analysis can deal with larger structures of meaning and thus gives rise to potentially much broader criticisms about the extent to which it is possible to make valid generalisations about visual representation on the basis of the appearance of individual elements. For example, it seems like a big step to take, between establishing the meaning making potential of individual graphical elements on the front page of a newspaper and to then relate this to the communicative function of the texts as a whole. This gives rise to a further question: does this type of approach work effectively for these larger structures, does it work for large chunks of discourse, for example, equivalent say to the paragraph or page, or perhaps even larger structures? It is not clear from the compositional analysis undertaken whether this is actually the case.

Framing, in the manner indicated in the quotes at the beginning of the chapter, actually points to content outside of the image and, therefore, outside of the frame's boundaries and is just as true for painting as it is for newspaper front pages. Framing, beyond the compositional constraints identified in this chapter occurs in two directions. First, outwardly to the

space beyond the image, this includes the relation between the image and the body. Second, inwardly, in a manner of speaking, into the mind of the viewer. Both are ways in which context can be applied to the text.

These concerns lead to a further and potentially more intractable set of problems associated with the style of compositional analysis used by Kress and van Leeuwen. For example, how do we account for aspects of the communication that are going around the text in question? This could be in the form of the kinds of mental processing, the cognitive activity applied to the work prior to the interpretation of semiotic resources. Context can also be associated with some of the physical aspects going on around the text, including the position and location of the artefact or, indeed, the position and location of the body. There are many ways in which an approach that is more sensitive to context might be undertaken. The next chapter begins to outline an alternative in the form of cognitive structures applied to interpretation. In addition, embodiment, as it is characterized in the penultimate chapter of the thesis attempts to expand on the work established in this chapter to important aspects of the space around the artefact and the key role of the body and its position in relation to this.

The following two chapters provide at least some groundwork to enable us to make judgments about reader performance and how framing, in the form of implicit judgments made about the nature of the texts (“structures of expectation”), that is, aspects of composition and layout and the empirical understanding of design elements through empirical means. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the thesis was originally to be set out in two distinctive halves, one that dealt with framing as content and another that expanded upon the criticisms made here about the lack of context. This is another very important aspect of framing that is not made reference to in the compositional analysis in this chapter and is absent from the approach taken by Kress and van Leeuwen. What follows in the next two chapters is, in the first instance, a view of framing that initially looks at the frame of reference and attempts to establish some of the mental processing that is applied to interpretation. Presented in the chapter after that is what I have called a

“naturalistic” approach to media texts, one that looks at aspects of reader performance and some of the judgments that those readers

In this sense the compositional framing that is used in *Reading Images* can be seen, at least in part, as a continuation of the type of work that was undertaken in Michael O’Toole’s *Language of Displayed Art* and still further back than that, a connection can be seen in *Social Semiotics* (Hodge and Kress: date). At least, there are important connections between the theoretical assumptions being made about communication and the application of framing to the methods used in analysis. As indicated, some of these concepts, in particular the contribution made by proximity and modal relations in an account of framing used are well worth exploiting for further analysis.

Having said this, Kress and van Lwueen’s approach in *Reading Images* and other empirically-led work that occurred soon after its publication is a highly instructive form of analysis. But it may not be generalisable enough to constitute a “grammar of visual design”. It still rests on the assumption that there are similar structures in language as there are in visuals and it is still not clear whether this is actually the case. The overall problem being that individual semiotic resources, as in the individual visual elements that contribute to an overall design or composition, are seen to be equivalent structures to the words and the clauses of language, but this may still not be the case. Composition assembles the pieces into a greater whole. But an extended piece of language such as a page, can count as discourse, but this is not necessarily the same with images. The relations of the parts to the whole occur in entirely different ways. Iconic signs, visual signs such as paintings, or indeed whole pages, we have to conclude, may not yield to a grammatical approach. The atomic analysis of semiotic resources in this chapter seems to resist the possibility of linking those individual atoms to larger structures and consequently more general concerns about communication, not least to the regularities required of a grammatical approach.

Chapter Four

Framing: “structures of expectation”

Introduction

If the previous chapter was intended to be about framing in terms of constraints determining the position and location of content, then this one was, at least at the point in the journey that it indicates was meant to be about context. As such, it prepares the ground for the second case study in Chapter Five where thinking, prior knowledge and expectations, are applied to user performance and reader interaction with news discourse online. The argument in this chapter being that framing, when seen from the point of view of context, as structures that constrain the meaning of texts that occur outside of the text itself, can be associated with the style of thinking that is applied to the interpretation of texts by readers. This contextual information is based both on the prior knowledge that is applied by the interpreter and in terms of the judgments that are made as a consequence of cues that are provided in the communication itself. Many of these cues, it is argued, are visual.

In fact, context is ultimately a combination of these. “Context, in other words, is the text itself, and it thus consists of signs that require interpretation. What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretative choices” (Bal and Bryson, 1990: 175. See also Culler, 1983: 11). Such styles of thinking, it is argued, come first in the form of communication about communication or what in some quarters has been called “meta-communication” (ibid.). Without such contextual information communication would not happen in the first place. Such cognitive processes, or at least those that are applicable to framing, come in the form of expectations, but so far in the research literature on framing this concept has only been applied to linguistic structures in discourse and not the visual. In the light of this chapter is intended to do two things. First, it develops the concept of framing in terms of context, in a way that should be applicable to multimodal communication.

It isolates specific structures in texts – contextual cues – that, it is argued, mirror, so called, “structures of expectation” (Tannen, 1993). These structures are prompted at least in the first instance by the visual and spatial characteristics of multimodal texts. Second, the chapter embarks on a lot of necessary ground work in order to prepare the reader for the investigation of empirical studies and the case study that follows in Chapter Five where there is an attempt to isolate and give evidence for these, so called, “structures of expectation” or at least to provide some data to support, or indeed, refute the notion that there is surface evidence, manifested in the visual design and layout of news stories, that indicate underlying cognitive structures such as expectations. In Chapter Five, experimental techniques are evaluated and developed on the basis of reader performance and on the basis of readers’ interaction with online media texts. The main purpose of this chapter, however, is to consider at a general level the extent to which ways of dealing with context in the manner described above, is an issue fundamentally to do with framing and, as suggested, to investigate how these structures might be applied to the analysis of media texts as a whole.

At this point in the process in the process of the research described it became necessary to seek out different approaches to framing and especially a version of framing that would start to fill the gaps that had appeared in the approach taken by Kress and van Leeuwen, especially in relation to the apparent lack of context identified at the end of the previous chapter. What was missing in their analysis was any reference to material signs or any processing that takes place around the text that contributes to the meaning of a communication. That is, what was missing was any reference to meaning making potential from outside of the boundaries of the text itself. In particular, what was being sought was a version of context that emphasised the potential of certain elements within the text that were there to provide information about the way that a communicative artefact is to be interpreted. In relation to this, an important assumption was being made about context. That is, that context was something that ultimately takes place in the mind, as part of cognitive and mental processing. And, moreover, that cues that trigger such mental processing and the subsequent contextual

information in the text was realised in the mind of readers. This is an important shift. It moves the analysis away from representation and the realisation of meaning through the deployment of semiotic resources, to how those semiotic resources might occur in cognition.

I was already aware of Goffman's work on framing from other studies as well as the fact that his work had resurfaced in some interesting places more recently and work in *Frame Analysis* (1974) as well as in *Gender Advertisements* (1976) seemed at the time to be a good starting point. This prompted a reading of Deborah Tannen's appropriation of Goffman's concept of framing, in particular his "structures of expectation" into her conversational studies in *Framing in Discourse* (1993). At the time this proved a most instructive direction for the investigation to go in. An alternative view of framing that had cognitive structures as its basis, at its starting point. But as this work progressed what actually came up was a series of alternatives, all dealing with framing, all seemed to address context in some way. Deborah Tannen's work can be seen in this light, as well as other authors working more recently who seemed to be dealing visual representation and multimodality (Bell and Milic, 2002) in a way that was also inspired by Goffman (1976).

But there was a lot of material from many other authors and from that came from a wide range of disparate disciplines that also beckoned an interest and subsequent reading. These were on the *margins* of this work and again were drawn from a wide range of different disciplines. But the important issue at this stage was that all of these authors talked about framing and context, framing from outside of the text. In Artificial Intelligence, for example, frames had been used as a theoretical construct to indicate, or at least conjecture about, some of the potential psychological and mental structures in the mind and how these function or how they might even be simulated in some way by computer programs: the frame, similar to Goffman, as a primary structure for making sense of experience (1974). Or indeed the analysis and interpretation of images from an art historical perspective, hence there is a section in this chapter that discusses Michael Baxandall's concept of the

“cognitive style” (1974), which has facilitated further insights from art historical research into this survey. Therefore, examples from these other authors demanded attention, not least because they all had something to say about framing, context and cognition. All, so it would appear, if they didn’t already, seem to be appropriate to apply not just to language, but to visuals as well.

Framing, Context and Meta-communication

It has been suggested that there is evidence for the existence of specific structures in language that indicate underlying cognitive structures labelled “structures of expectation” (Tannen, 1993). Tannen argues that: “on the basis of one’s experience of the world in a given culture (or combination of cultures), one organizes knowledge about the world and uses this knowledge to predict interpretations and relationships regarding new information” (1993:p. 16). In the first instance, this indicates the potential for frame to represent communication about the nature of communicative events - consequently the use of the phrase “meta-communication”. This notion of expectations then, as prior knowledge and judgements made about our experience of the world are assumed to be ‘given’ in any interaction and, as such, applies to all communicative events. They are given in the sense that these frames are applied at a fundamental cognitive level. Tannen has applied the concept to research on communication and social interaction and in particular to certain types of spoken discourse and dialogue and it is mostly in the area of sociolinguistics that this use of framing has been applied (Tannen, 1993; Tannen and Wallat, 1993). Alternatively, frames are here being used as another way of characterising the notion of context and developing it in terms that are potentially more subtle and grounded (Culler, 1988: ix). Such is the fundamental nature of framing that the line of argument that is developed here attempts to discuss framing in some depth as a key, initially to our understanding of the world around us; in the structure of many forms of communicative act and social interaction, but to extend this out to consider the implications of this form of framing in relation to the visual. The

assumption being that ultimately this way of characterising framing is applicable to the interpretation of images and to media texts in general. Only once these general concerns relating to framing, as an alternative to context, have been established in the sections that follow, do we move on to finding ways of integrating these issues into an empirical programme, as an attempt to prove Tannen's assertion about surface evidence for cognitive structures which is the main argument of the following chapter.

As already mentioned, the use of framing here is an attempt to provide more depth to the notion of context. However, this needs to be some qualification here as there is an important omission from this debate about context. In the current chapter reference is made to framing and context as this occurs in communication, and to communication that is about communication. Further, to argue that this leads us into the consideration of forms of cognition and mental processing. An alternative way of representing context, however, would be to allude to the many ways in which types of institutional pressures that are exerted on the production of meaning and interpretation of media texts. For example, this is the approach that Johnathan Culler (1988) has taken in relation to the way in which an important context for the interpretation of literary texts is one of how the institutions that surround these texts, such as education and publishing, affect their meaning. Whilst this does come into the debate at points, it is clearly an important issue in relation to the press, our interest here is with the types of thinking and, in particular, the role of expectations in the production of meaning.

Some time is spent in the latter sections of the chapter discussing the way that framing, as schemata or knowledge structures, has been adopted as a particular kind of cognitive process and applied to forms of visual communication. This form of framing has an important place in art history and art theory and the notion that there are both distinctive ways that interpretation can take place as well as how sense impressions form to create meaning in the first place. Various expressions have been used to denote this phenomenon of interpretation within visual communication, such as "cognitive eye", "mind's eye", "cognitive style", and "perceptual style". All

of these expressions link to how interpretation occurs at a cognitive level and have become important issues in both art historical studies and in work applicable to visual communication in general. Though, as far as it can be ascertained, such notions have never been applied to the analysis of media texts as such whereby framing maps onto, for example, the concept of a cognitive style as in the work of Baxandall (1974) on the application of shared assumptions about painting in fifteenth century Italy, or to more contemporary form of media, in particular film in the work of Bordwell (1985), more recently (McMahon's 2003) application of "Perceptual Schemata" and "Perceptual Style" is applied to the interpretation of images.

So framing occurs prior to any interpretation but also determine the interpretation. Unfortunately this may appear rather circular at first sight, so let me explain. Any communicative event, whether visual, verbal or otherwise, the context of the communication is decisive in the production of meaning. Therefore, there must be cues in any communicative event that gives information about the nature of the communication taking place and the manner in which it is to be interpreted. For example, anyone interacting with a media text such as a news story will apply certain expectations about the nature of the content and features of the interaction with the text. For instance, particular choices are made by the reader prior to choosing say a particular publication or website, for example. Once having made this choice, the reader is likely to focus on specific types of content over and above others.



Fig 4.1: *Daily Mirror*, Front page 5th April 2005.

A reader of the *Daily Mirror*, say, will have certain expectations in mind, first as to the nature of the content being packaged so to speak in newspaper form as well as from the point of view of the publication itself and through to the choice of content based on an examination of the front page in relation to what the reader can expect inside of the paper. The following chapter looks at these issues in an empirical light. Here, the task is much more to do with providing an analytical background and a theoretical framework for the analysis of framing structures from the point of view of context and the creation of meaning. The content of any communication would be meaningless without its context, without some kind of frame of reference and without contextual cues indicating how the content is to be interpreted. The act of predicting aspects of the content to be delivered in any communicative

event is a matter of how the content is framed. If framing is about context it is also about the information that we apply to a communicative event that give details about the nature and structure of the interpretation of that communicative event. Such events would be meaningless if such information were not readily available.

To take a hypothetical example, as we enter a room, it would be impossible, whether analysed from the point of view of a human cognitive processing task or as an physical experience, for anyone to make sense of what was in such a room, one that we were about to enter, unless there was some kind of mental prototype, something stored in memory, that at least gave us stereotypical information about the nature of all rooms and what is likely to be found on entering the room. Past attempts to describe these structures include Minsky (1975) in *Artificial Intelligence* and Gombrich (1960) in *Art Theory*. Such stereotypical information would have to be based on prior knowledge and experience of rooms in general. In Minsky's (1975) case frames were applied to ways of representing knowledge. Minsky's initial intention was to contribute to the field of artificial intelligence by producing a computer model (never fully realised). Framing was perhaps more appropriate as a conceptual tool even in Cognitive Science and it may be that what Minsky had planned was quite probably computationally impossible, certainly at the time. So Minsky's work remains as set of philosophical propositions about memory and knowledge which would draw on this concept of framing in an attempt to replicate certain aspects of human cognition. Instead, what he produced were certain key insights into the nature of human cognitive processing. In his formulation any new encounter of an event requires the application of general information that applies to all situations, similar to what might also be called stereotyped information that is stored in relatively permanent structures in the mind. In addition to this, elements of the frame respond dynamically to any new information that is required in order to make sense of the situation or event. Minsky's ideas can be seen as relating directly to the foundation of visual perception and the analysis of visual information applied to (or applied by) the human cognitive system. It therefore has resonances in relation to forms of vision from the

point of view of performance, that is, such phenomena as visual scene analysis and such mental processes as spatial reasoning. It forms something of a background to the work described in Chapter Five where aspects of human performance and especially linked to the spatial organisation of texts is considered. In computational terms “A frame is a data structure for representing a stereotypical situation” (Minsky 1975: 211) and makes it pretty much identical to the characterisation of frames as schema and as internal structure representing knowledge. Furthermore:

When one encounters a new situation (or makes a substantial change in one’s view of a present problem) one selects from memory a structure called a frame. This is a remembered framework to be adapted to fit reality by changing details as necessary. (Minsky 1975: 211)

Interestingly, this very much echoes Goffman’s concept of primary frameworks (1974: 21) only applied to a very different area of research:

Attached to each frame are (sic) several kinds of information. Some information is about the use of the frame. Some is about what one can expect to happen next. Some is about what to do if these expectations are not confirmed (Minsky 1975:212).

Here the frame contains information about the nature of the frame itself and the environment to which it refers and as such is similar to what Bateson called meta-communication. In the case of entering a room, the frame will contain rules, assumptions and hypotheses about the function of the frame and in particular will represent the relatively stable and permanent structures and how to use them. There are also similarities with Tannen and the emphasis expectations as being part of the structure of the frame. Not only does this work have many conceptual similarities with the presentation of Goffman and Tannen’s ideas in the previous sections, there is also a direct link between this aspect of cognition and the way that the notion of schemata has been developed in art historical studies to account for how perception and cognition deals with images.

Our relationship to media texts, it is argued, is quite like the analogy of the room and the cognitive implications that arise from this and that habituated readers of newspaper, for example, will have ready to hand in memory, a framework or schemata that indicates certain of the generic aspect of the text. For example, the interpretation that it is a newspaper, that it represents certain aspects of a reality. Or, that it is emphasising certain values and association over and above others. All of these are expectations that occur once we are confronted with these kinds of text. Therefore, depending on how familiar the type of text is, assumptions, at either a habitual or an unconscious level, will be made by the reader of the text. Further, it is not possible for the content of a communicative event to be meaningful unless the primary contextual information, in the form of expectations about the content, is in place first.

Meyer Schapiro writing on some of the fundamental semiotic visual structure in the history of painting poses an important question with respect to the binding of physical structures like the frame around a painting, as a boundary around represented content with the surface detail of content inside the frame, as fundamentally conventional, arguing that these structures are “historically developed”. The point here is that there is a real binding between representation and the frames of represented content, in this case the surface, say of a painting and its frame as a boundary with the content of visual memory and of perception. This is one of the positions taken here as we begin to uncover what is meant by framing:

It is not clear to what extent these elements are arbitrary and to what extent they inhere in the organic conditions of imaging and perception. Certain of them like the frame, are historically developed, highly variable forms; though obviously conventional, they do not have to be learned for the image to be understood: they may even acquire a semantic value. (Schapiro 1969: 223)

So, whilst the frame is a conventional form in visual structure in many forms of art such as paintings, they are, however, transparent, all but invisible to the viewer.

That said, the frame still functions to provide important cues to the viewer about how the content contained within the frame is represented and how it is to be interpreted by the viewer. At the very least the frame itself separates out the content within the frame and marks it out for special attention. That is to say, that the frame, whilst transparent, also provides important contextual cues about the communication itself. Schapiro goes on to argue:

We take for granted as indispensable means (sic) the rectangular form of the sheet of paper and its clearly defined smooth surface on which one draws and writes.

(Schapiro 1969: 223)

Interestingly, in this example Schapiro has moved away from the picture frame as a transparent structure to “a sheet of paper” and this is one of the fundamental features of, say, a page of print. The same is true of many structures for communicative artefacts. The page is itself both a highly conventional structure, but at the same time, its familiarity as a structure for the representation of content renders it transparent. We literally do not see the page as such, we only take in the content. Yet the page itself will provide information as to how the reader will interact with it. As readers we ordinarily know how to use it and how to orient ourselves in relation to the page in the act of reading. However, Schapiro says of this principle in relation to painting,

But such a field corresponds to nothing in nature or mental imagery where the phantoms of visual memory come up in a vague unbounded void.

(Schapiro 1969: 223)

At this point my argument regarding context deviates from Schapiro in that, to argue against him, there may well be equivalent structures *in-the-head*

and this is what is implied at least in the literature on framing and cognition, for example as with expectations.

Evidence from Tannen, for instance, and many of the experimental techniques presented in the following chapter would also suggest the opposite, whereby, frames act to support our interpretations of texts and engage with prior assumptions and with memory. Thus, whilst it is may not be that likely that actual spatial structures occur within the mind, there is every likelihood of there being such knowledge structures that are employed that take on a frame-like quality as structured information in memory. Whilst such structures are not visible as such, it is argued that there are cues that indicate underlying cognitive processes – “structures of expectation”.

Two authors have dominated the early intellectual development of framing in terms its function as a fundamental aspect of communicative events and forms of social interaction, anthropologist Gregory Bateson and sociologist Ervin Goffman. Bateson’s pioneering essay, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, provided much of the inspiration for the development of theories of framing in social interaction and language. This essay deals primarily with the provision of contextual information in social interaction at the highest level of abstraction, or alternatively, at the lowest level of unconscious processing. It is the application of framing at this level that we want to capture – before attempting to look at visuals in detail.

Whilst the physical frame around a picture operates as a clear boundary, it also has a function as part of the content. Thus it carries critical cues about interpretation.

The picture frame tells the viewer that he is not to use the same sort of thinking in interpreting the picture that he might use in interpreting the wallpaper outside the frame. (Bateson, 1972: 160)

Here there is a clear link between the physical frame around a picture and a means of interpretation that suggest a form of cognitive processing. In

addition, the cues provided by the frame act like instruction for the interpreter on how to read the messages contained inside them. In fact, Bateson goes so far as to argue that, "Every meta-communicative message is or defines a psychological frame" (ibid: 160). Once meta-communication comes into place, once we are talking about context, then we have to bring into our argument the existence of frames at a cognitive or perceptual level. The frame is like an instruction, or stage directions, on how to interpret communicative events. The argument is that this characterisation of framing can just as easily apply to the interaction and interpretation of visual elements in a media text.

Earlier in his essay on framing Bateson uses the example of newspaper headlines, in the first instance to exemplify the transparent nature of framing and the automatic perceptual properties applied to them. Second, the fact that, again, at a habitual and potentially unconscious level, we attach the content of the headline automatically to the world of real events, rather than simply as signs, suggesting that:

We all too often respond automatically to newspaper headlines as though these stimuli were direct object-indications of events in our environments instead of signals concocted and transmitted by creatures as complexly motivated as ourselves.

(160)

The argument so far goes along the following lines: framing occurs largely as a transparent structure for interpretation and as a context provides critical cues in the interpretation of communicative events.

That, as in the example of a newspaper headline, as a consequence of framing, signs are associated directly to a perceived reality in the world, further the reality of the news report (a news reading framing). So, counter to Schapiro, framing is, in an important way, a psychological reality.

We can say, at the level of interpretation that frames do exist *in-the head*, or at least this is what is assumed in cognitive explanation where frames are used to indicate specific mental processes, where the frame indicates the boundaries of a communicative event and ultimately is what is either inside or outside the frame.



Fig 4.2: Front page headline from *The Independent*, 22nd October 2008.

The frame indicates a style of interpretation through the provision meta-communicative information. The frame, thus, forges our relationship to content - a frame of reference - and, it creates distinctions between different types of content.

Framing and the “structure of experience”

Goffman (1974: 21) coined the term ‘primary framework’ to denote the initial function of framing as part of the means by which we make sense of experience. Data from the senses has to be processed in a particular way, which is often referred to as a ‘cognitive style’. The term “cognitive style” is used extensively in Baxandall, M. (1974) in art historical studies and is almost identical to what Goffman here calls a “Primary Framework” as a cognitive structure that orders experience into a particular style of interpretation. Experience is not just the continuous flow of sense data. Rather, all perception needs to be given a context or a means by which the content of an experience can be given meaning and interpreted out of a necessity to order and structure the complexity of our interaction with the

world that we inhabit. Many of these structures are learned. Goffman (1974: 21) explains the fundamental nature of the frame as a way of providing cues that are essential to the interpretation of any stimulus, be it from our environment or situation, or from a communicative event, our interest is its application to communication and whether such primary frameworks are discernable in visual communication:

When the individual in our Western society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect to employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation of a kind that can be called primary [...] [A] primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful.

(Goffman, 1974: 21)

Goffman's use of the term 'primary framework' emphasises the fundamental nature of this interaction and demonstrates this assumption that there is what can be termed a 'frame of reference' or set of associations that is immediately applied to any interaction or any event. In addition, the suggestion is that these frames of reference take the form of psychologically based schemata which already exist as part of a structure of interpretation residing in the mind of the human subject. The frame around a picture, the surface and edge of a page, are concrete visual instances of where such primary frameworks operate.

Goffman's key question, "What is it that's going on here?" (1974:8), can also be asked in relation to visual communication and his notion of 'primary frameworks' can be applied to the way that elements of visual design determine how media texts in general, and the visual presentation of news discourse is a particularly good example of this, are framed. Primary frameworks determine both the consumption of media messages in general cultural terms and their reception in the theoretical context of media theory. Primary frameworks help us to transform a random set of marks on the surface of a page of paper, or indeed graphical elements on a computer

screen, into intelligible representations for interpretation. When these are framed as news stories with their accompanying visual material (print type and size, paper size and shape, etc.).

Other important aspects of framing come into play here and include the reader's individual habits of consumption as well as the situation or context in which the messages are received. A framework of associations therefore is invoked, here on the basis of visual cues, which position the activity into the context of reading news – that is, a frame for news reading. These, and other factors, play a key role in determining how such messages are received and interpreted and processed initially through this notion of 'primary frame', and all contribute to the way that such media texts are framed as such.

In his later book *Gender Advertisements* (1976) Goffman dwelt specifically on visual representations and, in particular, the photographic images used in advertising and the way that gender relations, like the relations of power between genders, and the address between participants in the image and the audience are realised or given significance by means of visual structures and the framing of images. These representational structures have distinctive spatial characteristics. By applying concepts he had related to social interaction to aspects of visual representation in photography, amongst other things, Goffman sought to establish a connection between the structures found in visual representations and real social relations and especially those between genders that indicate form of power relations suggested by the positioning of elements. He identified certain regularities within advertising photography that articulate specific gender demarcations: "relative size" (1976: 28) male participants usually presented larger than women, "the feminine touch" (29-31) light touching of ritual objects, "function ranking" males represented as active rather than passive (32-35), "the family" (37) gender bonds - mother/daughter and father/son indicated in predominantly nuclear family relations. There are other distinctions here, but the point being that spatial relations can in very immediate ways indicate cultural and ideological associations such as power relations between genders. In fact, Goffman's work (1976) has been used and extended recently in some

studies broadly similar to a Systemic Functional approach in the work of Philip Bell (2002), for instance. These social structures meet semiotic ones in the application of space in the design and composition of images and is one of the consequences of the analysis of front pages in the previous chapter and especially the application of proximity to the composition and spatial structure of news stories.

It could be argued that the concept of framing presents a further level of complexity, however, when it comes to visual representation. On the one hand, the “primary frameworks” suggested by Goffman can be said to frame visual representations in so far as they enable them to make sense or have meaning and there would be no meaning unless such primary information as to the style of interpretation were not present. On the other hand, framing, by means of composition, and its form as distinctive spatial structures, determines the position of elements in the composition and the relations between elements. Framing in visual representations carry these two meanings and both, it is argued, operate simultaneously.

As the discussion of Goffman’s presentation of primary frameworks shows, photography is a particularly good example of this duality since as a medium it frequently articulates ideas purely on the basis of composition and spatial structures. Conventions relating to the spatial positioning of elements and participants in an image contribute to the framing of that text and the message it carries. Hodge and Kress (1988: 52-53) referred to these as proxemic relations, arguing that the positioning of elements in space, especially when those represented elements are people, will determines the relationship that is assumed between elements on the basis of social cues. Thus, the position of an element will have an impact on the way that the image is interpreted. Moreover, visual representations do this on the basis of assumed relationships in the social world. To an extent echoing Goffman in *Gender Advertisements*, Kress and van Leeuwen put it this way, that:

The members of a group, for instance, may be shown in a group portrait (as in group photos of school classes or employees of a company) or in a

collage of individual photos, marked off by frame lines and/or empty space between them (as with photos of the managers of a company in a company brochure).

(1996: 214 – 215)

These are important contextual cues that go beyond those presented in the semiotic approach presented in the previous chapter. The relations that are set up between elements are also forged in terms of the spatial characteristic of the representation. Certain assumptions, therefore, are made about the degree of social distance or intimacy between, say, two people in a portrait if they are represented in the image in close proximity to one another. It is argued that this is also true of the spatial relations that are set up as part of the composition of other forms of media text. Significance and therefore value is associated to elements in the text purely on the basis of the spatial arrangement and compositional devices used in their design.

“Structures of Expectation”

Deborah Tannen (1993) makes an important contribution to our understanding of the way that framing relates to the delivery of meta-communication or meta-messages in conversation and discourse, arguing that:

The only way that we can make sense of the world is to see the connections between things, and between present things and things we have experienced before or heard about. [...] As soon as we measure a new perception against what we know of the world from prior experience, we are dealing with expectations.

(Tannen, 1993: 15)

Tannen’s basic premise, outlined above, is that our capacity to make sense out of communication is a matter of making connections either between aspects of our current experience, the links between them, or on the basis of

a comparison with past events. This entails firstly making connections between different aspects of direct experience and then making connections between what is experienced and prior knowledge stored in memory. In a similar vein to Goffman, Tannen asks a fundamental question, namely 'What's in a frame?' (1993: 15). She further develops the notion that framing is a way of receiving messages about the way that the world is, or, more specifically, a way of receiving details about the nature of a given communication. Tannen follows in the footsteps of Bateson and Goffman but makes a significant extension to their theory of framing by developing ideas about the link between experience and expectations. She argues that if our experiences and interaction with the world are, at least initially, based on prior knowledge or structures in memory, then it must follow, therefore, that we apply prior assumptions and expectations to our environments and our interactions in communication.

The significance of Tannen's contribution to our understanding of framing is the emphasis on expectations and the link between the perception of environmental information and the mental structures that enables human subjects to make sense of that environment, with particular relevance in her research to spoken discourse. Moreover, she believes that these underlying cognitive structures can be isolated, studied and analysed. Coming from the discipline of linguistics, she argued that these structures could be determined most easily by analysing spoken dialogue or conversation. If Tannen's work deals mainly with spoken discourse, to what extent can her ideas about framing, expectations and underlying cognitive structures be applied to the visual component of texts? What kinds of visual cues exist or are employed in the design of texts in order to engage with reader expectations? To what extent can these cues be said to provide evidence for underlying cognitive structures and processes? Most of the work on framing in relation to forms of social interaction has tended to focus on spoken discourse. However, the argument being developed here is that these ideas can also be usefully applied to aspects of visual communication. That is to say, that context will determine the signification and thus the meaning that is created by the text.

Let us consider, as an example, the way that content is presented on the pages of a magazine. Our expectations of this kind of artefact are framed by our prior experiences of publications of this type. Its genre as a magazine article is established in a fundamental way by what has been experienced before. Even specific elements in the design will invoke prior knowledge of similar artefacts. For example, the position and size of images and photographs, type face and the varying forms that type takes on the page, even the shape and size of the page itself, all these elements make reference to prior knowledge. Furthermore, as Tannen has indicated, our capacity to “make sense of the world” is linked to our ability “to see connections between things” (1993: 15) and this is just as much the case with visual communication as it is with verbal forms of communication. The magazine article would have us make connections between the photograph and the text and to make judgements about the nature of the article on the basis of spatial cues. The emphasis that Tannen places on prior knowledge and expectations plus her declared intention to attempt to isolate the “underlying cognitive structures” at play in discourse indicate that her views on framing draw upon cognitive ways of explaining human interaction.

Can we find evidence for such “structures of expectation” in the visual component of media texts? Are there any similarities, or indeed any significant differences between printed texts and online ones with respect to framing in terms of expectations? These questions are dealt with in more detail in chapter six. But as the spatial properties of media texts has been introduced in terms of the ‘primary frameworks’ indicated here, it can at least be said that, in a similar vein, that isolating visual structures that are central to readers’ interaction with both screen based and online media representations that at least appear to function only as a consequence of the application of prior knowledge and therefore of expectations. In addition, in the moves taken in the reading of a text it is possible to isolate specific reading paths, or navigation paths, that also indicate the connections between elements in the interaction. Both at least have the appearance at this stage to order the interaction with the text from the point of view of structures similar to what Tannen has termed expectations.

So far the majority of what has been said about framing and context has been in terms of modes of communication other than visual. But is information acquired through the visual channel a special case? One of the more general objectives of this chapter and the one that follows and indeed the major issue that distinguishes them is the distinction between framing and *in-the-head* processes in perception and cognition and as actual visual structures *in-the-world*. It is necessary at this point to discuss some of the cognitive implications of framing beyond that of expectations and to consider the applications of framing to forms of visual communication. The major objective here is to at least establish whether there is any evidence for the existence of any underlying cognitive processes that are similar to the structures of expectation discussed in the previous section and whether these are manifested through the visual. In the literature on the psychology of visual perception the word schemata is used to signify exactly the same structure as framing at a cognitive level and as such they are interchangeable. Frames and schemata have been incorporated into the understanding of visual forms of text relating cognitive structures to the reconstruction of narrative in film to approaches to both the production of art works and their reception by audiences in the visual arts and painting in particular.

Cognitive Style

It was Rudolph Arnheim (1974 and 1983) who initially forged a link between theories of visual perception and cognition and introduced many topics from Gestalt psychology into the analysis of a wide variety of creative acts and especially those associated with drawing and painting. Arnheim applied these terms from the point of view of both the generation of artistic work by practitioners as well as the interpretation of images by an audience. It is the latter that is of most interest to us. In the sense that the active role played by cognition in the interpretation of images and a wide range of visually based artefacts will have an influence on interpretation and on framing. The key

premise to be taken from Arnheim's formulation is that, the recognition of images and their application to cognitive processing is far from passive, as had hitherto been assumed (1974: 37-53); both the act of creating and of interpreting art objects, are active and dynamic processes when it comes to cognition. In fact, he went to great lengths to highlight this active role of visual processing and applied it similar ideas to the study of filmmaking and in fact had a lot to say about composition (1983). Arnheim also combined principles from the psychology of perception with art theory thus giving the concept of schemata a real application to the study of painting in what is now, in some quarters at least, rather disparagingly called the "Perceptualist" approach to the visual arts. These ideas appear to be central to an understanding of how such features as composition in painting and other forms of visual texts and as such are actually key to communication that goes beyond the visual.

"When the eyes meet a picture for the first time, they are faced with the challenge of the new situation: they have to orient themselves, they have to find a structure that will lead the mind to the picture's meaning" (1983: 71). Arnheim goes on to explain the gravitational pull of the centre of many forms of imagery and pictorial representation and the "power of the centre" in Western forms of art. For example, shape perception requires the active and dynamic processing of image data by the viewer. The point being that the emphasis is on the dynamics of perception and how this enables us to begin to see the visual sense as much more of a hybrid of senses acting alongside other forms of information and, indeed, it is most likely that the concept of frames and schemata developed here might comprise of data from more than one sense. In so doing adding further justification for this argument about the inherent multimodality of all communication: composition and space being an important case in point.

This argument states that on the basis of feedback, the eye provides information to the perceptual and cognitive system information that is continually being added to pre-existing schemata. Rather like hypotheses, these existing structures in knowledge store visual information which is

continually being tested as part of on-going cognitive processes. Gombrich's account of the psychology of pictorial representation applies simultaneously to the generation of images by their creators and to their interpretation by an audience in what he has called "the beholder's share" (1977: 154). In these terms any act of mark making is related, in the first instance, to stored knowledge held in a schema of representation: "All representations are grounded on schemata which the artist learns to use" (ibid). This is an important point because it seems to be arguing that there must be some form of internal representation first, a schemata, before the act of representation or mark making can happen in the first place. The point being that the application of schemata of representation involves continuous revision in order to establish the best fit between the object or scene being represented and what is in the mind and held in the schemata.

In reference to the notion of "cognitive style" Baxandall (1972), in describing attempts to reconstruct aspects of the reception of painting in the history of art, elucidates on the way that images are interpreted at the level of cognition:

The brain must interpret raw data about light and colour that it receives from the cones and it does so with innate skills and those developed out of experience. It tries out relevant items from its stock of patterns, categories, habits of inference and analogy – 'round', 'grey', 'smooth', 'pebble', would all be verbalised examples – and these lend the fantastically complex ocular data a structure and therefore a meaning.(Baxandall, 1974: 29)

This brings all of the issues together so far very effectively and links all that has been said about frames and experience with the internal cognitive structures being posited here and applying them to the act of visual interpretation.

That which we tend toward will depend on many things – particularly on the *context* (my emphasis) of the configuration [...] but not least on the interpreting skills one happens to possess, the categories, the model

patterns and the habits of inference and analogy; in short, what we may call one's *cognitive style*. (Baxandall, 1974: 30)

Finally, Baxandall argues for the existence of a “perceptual style”. The point is that, in her terms, we relate “knowledge to a given context” and that context relies on the existence of internal mental representations. However, it is important to note that the connection between prior knowledge and expectations, introduced in the previous sections has clear links with research in Cognitive Science and Artificial Intelligence. The kinds of generalised contextual information afforded by the notion of primary frameworks in Goffman's Frame Theory (1975 and 1976) find very clear articulation in the work of Deborah Tannen in linguistics but clearly applicable to the analysis of media texts.

Conclusion

It is still unclear about what actual evidence is being used here in order to validate the potential for cognitive structures inside the head. Even if it is possible to identify expectations, in parts of conversation, it is still not possible to see the actual process from which this thinking is derived. It's worth reminding ourselves of Shapiro's quote at the beginning of the previous chapter, where “...in mental imagery where the phantoms of visual memory come up with a vague and unbounded void” (1969:223). We may speculate about the existence of these mental structures, but there is no real way of finding concrete evidence to substantiate their existence. Markers and cues abound and we can see these clearly represented visually and in their form as semiotic resources, as material signs. On the basis of the discussion in this chapter about potential cognitive structures it is important to establish whether this is similar to the concerns voiced in the previous chapter in relation to semiotic theory. Put simply, is it possible to distinguish framing in the manner presented in this chapter - as a set of contextual resources, expectations? To see this as fundamental to what gets communicated in the first place, as in the concept of the “primary framework” as seen in Goffman?

It is necessary, therefore, to establish whether such surface features as the spatial arrangement of texts as a whole, or the location and appearance of individual design elements in a text, can be analysed in terms of their capacity to signify deeper structures like the “structures of expectation” mentioned in relation to Tannen’s work on conversation analysis. The argument is that content is framed visually but in the sense that there are distinctive spatial structures used in visual design that will provide evidence for expectations and cognitive structures in discourse at a deeper level. In turn do they indicate key cognitive structures that are necessary for interpretation, “structures of expectation”?

Furthermore, in the previous chapter social semiotics was criticised partly on the basis of its linguistic heritage, in the sense that there was the suspicion there that there was too much of reliance upon the use of a linguistically derived theory to account for the meaning making potential of images and visuals. It could be just as easy to say that adopting Tannen’s methods, as is being advocated here, would seem to be falling foul of exactly the same objection. But at this point in the journey, during the time where alternatives to semiotics were being sought, it was more a case of finding a quick and ready method of establishing the cognitive function of certain visual elements within the text. To this extent the ideas presented in Tannen’s work seemed to fit the bill. To add to this, these objections were developed much later in the process of research.

At this point there were no such objections to apply, either in relation to the systemic functional background to Kress and van Leeuwen’s work, not with the sociolinguistics of Tannen’s approach to conversation analysis and my adoption of it here as a potential methodology in the following chapter. It is only with the benefit of hindsight that these objections became clear.

Another objection that might be leveled at this point, in the light of both theory and method, is associated with how it is possible to make appropriate generalisations on the basis of the appearance and function of individual elements in visual design. There seems to be a gap here in relation to the

capacity to make generalisations about framing at this level and how they are manifested in relation to finding actual features in the text that back these generalisations up. This is almost the opposite to the problem of the generalisability of the evidence in social semiotics. A lot has been conjectured here in relation to the existence of frames and expectations, but attempting to find individual features that provide appropriate evidence for the existence of these structure remains to be seen.

Given the discussion in this chapter each individual reader is likely to bring a rather different set of expectations to their interaction with media texts depending on prior experience, values and associations – our “cognitive style” – that we bring to bear on our reading of texts. But each is still constrained by the frame in which the interaction is located, its context. Whilst the “cognitive style” constitutes a frame in itself, we are each of us constrained by the context and nature of the location or situation in which the action takes place, see for example Tannen (1993: 22) and Culler (1998:ix). This interaction will also be driven by a reader’s expectations of what the content of a text is likely to yield and that much of this is done prior to when interaction takes place. Certainly, this would be the case if we accepted the argument so far. With expectations as a key issue in framing from the point of view of context and the fact that this, in the terms set out in the previous sections, then becomes evidence for underlying cognitive processes. Up to now the emphasis has been on the predominant influence of the surface of a given text upon the mind of the reader and the choices which follow from this. However, it is possible to challenge this approach on the grounds that there is a wider context or frame of reference that can be applied to the consumption of media texts.

Context, therefore, is applicable at many different levels. For example, there is the situation in which texts are consumed, or the realization of some kind of institutional message will give rise to a more global or generalized context. Branding in print media is a particularly good example of this. The recognition and understanding of specific design elements, such as type, will be driven by expectations about the brand. Simple spatial cues such as the

size and style of type and its rendering on the page perform important contextual functions. Concepts like branding rely on there being a high degree of consistency between a number of graphical features, such as the use of specific typefaces and the design of logotypes etc. This is true particularly when that consistency serves an institutional function and with more global brands these messages become ever more saturated and ever more transparent. Familiarity with a brand through repeated exposure develops habits and expectations about the nature of the message relating to the brand and is therefore an important frame for communication, independently of the specific visual clues in the text itself.

In the light of what has been discussed in this chapter there are some key issues here that are addressed in the next chapter:

- Can using methods derived from Tannen, if used in a naturalistic way, really provide evidence for underlying cognitive structures?
- How is the relation between surface contextual cues and the underlying processes established on the basis of visual cues?
- What types of method are suitable in the context of the visual presentation of news discourse?
- Is there any evidence of a shift in context from one medium to another and how are users' expectations applied when it comes to the visual presentation of news discourse online?

The work presented in the following chapter indicates, therefore, attempts to establish whether it is actually possible to provide evidence for underlying cognitive processes on the basis of aspects of visual design and layout. In addition, it will establish whether there are important differences in the interpretation of visual design elements across both print-based representations and screen-based ways of presenting news and especially in terms of any prior knowledge or expectations that are applied to the reading

of the text. The second of these intentions also suggests that there may be some important ways in which patterns of consumption and patterns of reading that are altered between the two media.

Expectations play a significant part in reader's interaction with multimodal texts and methods need to be devised whereby this can be established on an empirical basis and then included in any general assumptions made about the design of media texts and how readers engage with them. Semiotic methods were applied to multimodal texts and analysed in Chapter Three and it was found that there were some key structures in their visual design that made reference to some key spatial characteristics: framing, composition, modal relations and proximity. In the chapter that follows practical and empirical methods are used in order to pay close attention to how readers, or users in the online case, apply expectations about the nature of content online to their interaction with the texts in question. Even if it may not be possible to attach the use of visual design with any underlying cognitive processes in a concrete way an investigation into the use of potential of the methods to find them is assumed to be instructive in any case. Especially in relation to embedding further what was found to be the case with semiotic resources in the previous case study and where the system of proxemic coding, closeness and distance for example, and their relation to composition in that point in the research. What follows is an attempt to establish how readers use spatial information to make sense of how to interact with the text in the first place and how this is driven by the structure of content, and how this in many respects governs choice in navigation.

Chapter Five: A Study of Interaction

Introduction

Why was the experimental work described in this chapter carried out, because on first inspection the material presented in what follows might appear out of place, especially in the light of the descriptive analysis in Chapter Three. Before commencing a discussion of the research in this chapter the following rationale is provided with the intention of justifying the various moves and changes in direction that had taken place in the preparation of the latter parts of the thesis. It must be noted that in all of the empirical work described here, there was the sense of attempting to find a potential range of alternatives. In addition, the model of communication described in the previous chapter is just that, a model, and in this chapter attempts to try out that model in the form of some experimental work are illustrated. The alternative methods here have a background in psychological and naturalistic methods. It could be argued that a more ethnomethodological approach would be more appropriate. In fact, the tools used here are very similar to those used in ethnomethodology and in audience studies. In addition, work undertaken at Lund University described in the sections that follow resemble the methods used here and also make reference to layout elements referred to by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 1998) are broadly similar. However, in the methods that were eventually adopted, there was always going to be a mapping between the semiotic resources, as in individual layout elements, derived from the work in Chapter Three and the details in interaction that were established by those involved in the experimental work described in this chapter.

An opportunity presented itself that afforded the possibility of deriving material directly from interaction and the potential of doing some experimental work that would forward the argument about framing and establishing some of the contextual information that readers apply to their interaction with texts. This opportunity came out of a Transdisciplinary Research programme funded by the Economic and Social Research Council

(REF - details) and coordinated by the researcher. A two-day event was scheduled with the intention of discussing the future of print, and in particular, how print news was being impacted by the widespread use of the web as a medium for distribution and consuming news. A day was set aside in order to focus on research methods in this area and sessions planned that would see the methods described in this chapter being used in situ.

Techniques were to combine methods used in the *Psychology of Illustration* (Evans, 1987), hence the reference to naturalistic methods in the title of the chapter, in combination with the application of usability to establish surface aspects of navigation, in particular, users' or readers') initial reactions to their engagement with the texts in question. Usability had become widely accepted in studies of human-computer interaction (Stanford/Poynter, 2004) and as a concept was applied to the study of news reading online. Usability has, in the past, been used to establish how well user interfaces appeal to the needs of their users. Now, the same techniques were being deployed to establish, among other things, the ease, or otherwise, with which readers can gain access to content on web pages. More specifically, as will be seen in this chapter, they were being used in some major studies of reading news online. Some of which, as in the Lund Group studies were attempting to combine the style of research indicated in this chapter with semiotics (Wartenberg and Holmqvist, 2005).

This trajectory seemed to fit very well what was needed to be done with the thesis at the time. Even if at this point the study as a whole was beginning to fragment into a series of separate studies rather than a thesis that consisted of a single sustained and integrated survey of one set of methods. From the point of departure in the previous chapter, to look broadly at context as a cognitive phenomenon, it could be argued, that on disciplinary grounds that the work was also fragmenting. This was not seen as a difficulty at the time. The interdisciplinary nature of this project is seemed to be a highly positive feature of the work. Indeed, rather than a deficiency, it seemed like an urgent matter largely because of the existence of other similar surveys that were using and expanding on the concept of usability to support the analysis of reader behaviour and applied to the reading of news online. The potential in

devising a bespoke survey for the purposes of the thesis was difficult to ignore, so the survey, based on relatively simple set of tasks given to users was designed and undertaken as part of a seminar series.

A further rationale as to why it was necessary to continue to use the visual presentation of news discourse needs also to be given. Had I become more interested in news at the expense of theoretical issues such as framing and multimodality? There is a connection between the descriptive work that forms the basis of chapters two and three and the experimental and naturalistic work being done here. To explain this, similar to what was said in the previous chapter about distinguishing between two contrasting definitions of framing (between content and context), here so it seemed, a distinction was also to be made between two very different research traditions – between the descriptive approaches to media texts given by semiotics and the naturalistic ones given by the methods outlined in this chapter; based largely on methods derived from the psychology of visual perception and usability studies. But there seemed to be a real opportunity to combine these different approaches. Therefore, the work carried out here is not a rejection of social semiotics. But there did seem to be a pressing need to find ways of filling some of the gaps that are evident in that approach and especially when it comes to working with forms of new media and in the visual presentation of news discourse online.

Therefore, if this and the previous chapter looked out of place it is likely to be for the following reasons. The material in this chapter and the previous one looks like a departure away from more conventional ways of looking at media texts. That is, it is not a continuation of the discussion of semiotics. If the work that was carried out in those earlier chapters had been continued, then this would have limited the scope of framing to just one set of ideas relating to composition and not applied to other important issues going on around the text; the context of interaction and the actual use of visual design elements made by readers. At best, this strategy is an attempt at interdisciplinary research. But going in this direction there was always the risk that this was too much of a departure away from semiotics. At worst, therefore, this

strategy would risk further fragmentation of the thesis into a series of different studies that lacked integration. At the time, the risk seemed well worth taking.

Also to be considered was a growing concern for the use of media technologies in urban settings and ideas for the final sections of the thesis were being planned along these lines. In the light of this there was also a suspicion that there were yet more potential ways of applying framing to the consumption of media text and not least the application of theories of embodiment. This last point, if followed through in the final sections of the thesis. But again this came with the risk of further fragmentation of the thesis as a whole. In the end, it meant that the thesis was already starting to move away from the critique of visual literacy in the second chapter towards other theoretical issues associated with the visual presentation of news discourse online. But the decision to do this was a pragmatic one; making the best use of the opportunity to do some experimental work, to exploit the interdisciplinary potential of working in this way, and to align the work with other studies that seemed to be going in this direction.

To be much more specific about these changes in direction, in the light of the discussion of semiotic resources in Chapter Three and to begin to make a necessary connection between some of the conclusions there about reading order in multimodal texts, it became important to establish the first moves that readers make in relation to their interaction with texts and with the visual presentation of news content online. This is essentially what the survey at the centre of this chapter was intended to establish and techniques from usability studies were deployed and considered, at the time, to be an appropriate way of doing this. The concepts of “entry points” and “reading paths” were applied to this initial interaction with the texts in question. This was done primarily to enable the outcomes of the discussion of social semiotics to be continued but applied to aspects of the actual physical engagement with the texts and what readers actually do and think about when reading. That is, what salient features are used by readers during their initial interaction with the text? Are there ways of aligning this interaction with

the “structures of expectation” discussed in the previous chapter? This mixing of techniques from different disciplines, and especially the idea that you could add to the finding from research in one field of study by using the results developed from another was, at the time, seen to be an entirely positive aspect to the project as a whole.

A Naturalistic Approach to Media Texts

Framing is just as much to do with the location and position of the body and movement than it is to with the location and position of content. In fact, through framing this is what the arrangement of content - composition *per se* – will do. This chapter begins to look at performance, the movement of the body caused by layout. Therefore, the case study that follows is rather different from the previous one in Chapter Four. This is because it attempts to provide a critique of methods and to describe real experimental work that is naturalistic in its general approach (Evans et al, 1987). There are two distinctive aims in what follows. On the one hand it provides a survey of recent research that studies the performance of readers of online texts and newspaper websites in particular. On the other hand, a description and an evaluation of experimental work created in order to address some specific research questions is provided. The latter was considered necessary in order to extend the critique of method established in the first sections of the chapter. It is also an attempt to substantiate the claim that there is “surface evidence for underlying expectations” and that these can be recorded through the application of naturalistic research technique. Here, an experiment was set up with real subjects in order to analyse aspects of their consumption of news and their interaction with content online. Attention is paid to the location of areas of interest and the readers’ first moves in their interaction with online texts. This has been driven specific questions that attempt to establish what kinds of expectations and prior knowledge are applied to these first steps in interacting with and reading of the texts in question. So, at the heart of this chapter is the presentation of “An Integrated Task”, so called, that is naturalistic in its general approach.

By using the term naturalistic what is attempted here is to put the consumption of news and the interpretation of the design of front pages into the context of actual use. That is to follow through actual interaction and to see how readers read and interact with the artefacts in question. Naturalistic methods, as a general research strategy, tend to observe performance in specific contexts and are used extensively within disciplines like psychology. For example, in a chapter entitled “A Naturalistic Inquiry into Illustrations in Instructional Texts” (ibid.) the authors provide a survey of experimental work on the Psychology of Illustration both from the point of view of making general judgments about basic research in the area as well as establishing ways of constructing experiments that attempt to recreate, albeit in controlled settings, salient aspects of interaction with texts. Therefore, that the argument being developed in this chapter is based, in the first instance on judgements concerning the validity of existing research techniques, especially with regard to readers’ interaction with news content, both printed and online, and subsequently using experimental techniques, through the observation and analysis of what readers actually do with the texts, or indeed, what texts do to readers.

The work presented here is also pragmatic in the sense that reader performance and the experimental techniques used to establish this are emphasised and, therefore, as an approach is somewhat different to the descriptive approach taken in the previous chapter. It is pragmatic also in the sense that it is a study of what people actually, their actions and their various moves and decisions as they work with the texts in question. Therefore, at the heart of this chapter is the presentation of actual experimental work performed with a small group of participants and provides some empirical findings, however provisional, taken from participants’ actual interaction with online texts. Alongside this is a discussion of other recent studies that conform to this naturalistic approach but have used rather different techniques.

As a further distinction between descriptive and naturalistic approaches to the analysis of multimodal texts there are two fundamental questions that effectively act as a bridge between the previous chapters and this one. The first, relevant to a descriptive semiotics, as in the perspective taken in Chapter Three, asks of the texts:

How much of the reader's gaze is directed by the nature, structure and visual design in the presentation of content, that is, as a direct result of the visual design and layout of an online document such as the front page of an online newspaper?

But, relevant the naturalistic perspective taken in what follows:

How much of the reader's gaze is directed by prior knowledge, interests and hence their expectations about the nature of the content?

Thus, the main topic of this chapter is to substantiate the claim that there is a link between surface behaviour that is evident within interaction and performance with cognitive processes. This was the challenge set in the previous chapter in reference to Deborah Tannen in *Framing and Discourse* (1993) regarding, so called, "structures of expectation". Here we attempt to supply some experimental evidence to this and establish whether there are ways in which aspects of surface interaction, as in what people do and say as part of their interaction with texts and deeper cognitive processing that manifest themselves as expectations and prior knowledge. To put it another way, can we detect some of the frames in cognition that determine important aspects of interaction and the extent to which this is governed, or at least constrained, by visual design, layout and other spatial characteristics of the texts in question? Further, the argument proposed here is that these can be applied to an understanding of page layout and composition in specific user interaction tasks. In terms of experimental work, information was sought from surface evidence of user interaction with online news content and observations made that yield important details about deeper level distinctions

in relation to the interpretation of content in general and especially in terms of the way that interaction is topic-driven. As such, the intention is to establishing what modes of interaction exist that are driven by expectations about the nature of the content.

For example, the position of an entry point on a page of text is critical in terms of how a text engages with readers and how the gaze is directed by the nature of the content on display. In addition, how an entry point is linked to subsequent moves in the reading process will, on the one hand, indicate judgements made about the text, on the other, may occur differently across different type of media: from print to screen, for example. This is especially the case when the issue of proximity and the spatial relations is considered and the subsequent relations between individual elements in a composition, that is to say when the impact of framing in its compositional sense is considered. Here there is a direct link between framing as a compositional structure and as a set of contextual cues.

In the previous chapter the argument suggesting the existence of frames, as a distinctive cognitive structure, was proposed on the basis that cues regarding expectations in spoken discourse is evidence for underlying cognitive processes, known as “structures of expectation” or schemata. Furthermore, that by extension, as in Tannen’s formulation, these structures are characterised as frames of reference as a way of both contextualizing and containing information about discourse and as metacommunication or information about the nature of communication taking place and are cues as to how the content of messages are to be interpreted. As Tannen puts it:

Any speech event represents the overlapping and intertwining of many relations concerning the context as well as the content of communication (Tannen, 1993a :22).

As such, frames as the containers for content provide their own set of cues regarding the way that content is interpreted. In addition, frames bring together many layers of information to the reader of a given text (O’Malley,

2009: 347). One of those layers is the structure of the design of the text presented in the previous chapter. Another is what readers bring to bear in their interaction in the form of cognitive structures and, in particular, expectations about the nature of the content. In this sense, content and context are combined and framing becomes a convenient structure to account for this overlapping of content and context.

Thus, there are two principles to be established here to begin to account for framing at this level. The first is to establish conclusively the existence of entry points. Entry points in studies of reading are usually where the eye comes to rest and where content is absorbed in some way. Or, as in the case of web pages an action, like clicking on a hyperlink, takes place. In eye-tracking research this can be established by observing a phenomenon known as “dwell-time” (Duchowski, 2003: 139), where the eye stops and thinking starts. In direct observation of reader interaction it will also occur as a click on a mouse button. The important issue here relating to entry points, from the point of view of news consumption and visual design is that the location of these will have a value associated to them. In Kress and van Leeuwen’s terms these are particularly “salient” aspects of the text and have a specific communicative function both for readers and those who design the text visually. In eye-tracking methodology the “dwell-time” also indicates the “area of interest”. These concepts borrowed and adapted from eye-tracking methodology are used in the survey that follows to gain an understanding as to what motivates readers in their choice of an entry point, and further to see if there is any connection between this and the actual location of the entry point on the page; whether there is any bias towards left and right, for example.

The second, more speculative principle is that performance and reader interaction with content and knowledge about its location is learned in interaction through repetition and habit. In experimental work, described here and elsewhere, the focus is initially on the location of entry points and forging a link between what informs the reader in their choice of a particular entry point and its location in relation to the layout of content on the rest of the

page on-screen, that is to say, that “an influence could be exerted by an expectation of where a target might be found” (McCarthy 2003: 2). That is to say that readers will make prior judgments about the content and its location. The target here, therefore, is the first point at which the reader engages with content: the entry point. Previous work has tended to focus mainly on location and the position of the entry points in relation to the rest of the layout. However, as McCarthy suggests there is a connection between the choice of an entry point and any prior knowledge that the reader applies to that choice. This has been the case with much eye-tracking research on reader behaviour and interaction with web pages in general. Ultimately we want to be able to confirm, as McCarthy puts it, that “such expectations are *top-down* factors based on memories of ‘*what is where*’ from previous interactions and are a defining feature of a convention” (ibid.) and as such this is learned behaviour and very much a part of the context that is invoked by the visual presentation of content in multimodal media texts.

This contributes to the sense of familiarity associated with repeated and learned interaction. Many graphical conventions, it is argued, map directly onto the expectations that readers have about reading content on a website and in particular about reading news. Thus, there will be a cognitive dimension to the spatial characteristics of layout conventions. These conventional elements are, metaphorically, part of the furniture of the website. This relates back to what was said in Chapter Two about the representation of frames as specific kinds of cognitive structure that occur in memory. There the example of a room and our prior knowledge and generalisations made about the typical contents of the room can, it was suggested, be applied to a reader’s interaction with web-based news content.

By way of an example, there will be many elements on the front page of a news website that are both common to readers and therefore form part of an expectation about the design of the site. A simple example would be the use of a logo, which as a convention is similar, if not identical to, the masthead of the daily paper edition. On the *USA Today* website, the logo is always

positioned in the same location – to the left of centre and at the top of the screen. It is a stable feature of the visual design of the site and as such only minor changes, if any at all, are applied to it over relatively long periods of time.



Fig. 5.1 The entire page of *USAToday* website from 18th June 2004

Other aspects of the layout are relatively permanent and fixed, such as the coloured navigation index to the left of the masthead, again they are remained remarkably stable, even across a six-year period. The existence of columns, another convention, like the masthead, that has migrated from print allows for the organisation of content into distinctive spatial units and affords for the application of a grid structure to structure the page as a whole.

On one level it is a question of layout elements being in the right place, so to speak. On another, as a consequence of familiarity, readers will always notice when the position of a common element of the design has been

altered or its position changed – much like the experience of discomfort felt when the contents of supermarket shelves have been moved around. Initially at least, it will take time to learn this new arrangement and get used to new conventions in the design of the space and, therefore, in the design of content.

Tracking Layout in the News

What evidence and hence what techniques need to be developed to indicate that there are structures of expectation, similar to those established by Tannen in language, that function at the cognitive level and are manifested in the visual design, layout and overall spatial qualities of multimodal texts? If so, how do we go about establishing whether there is such a connection?

There have been a number of useful studies recently - most notably *Stanford/Poynter* (2004) and *Lund University Cognitive Science Department* (2003) - that have used experimental techniques with readers of online news content and the extent to which these studies imply such structures of expectation, and therefore, frames, is taken into consideration. In addition, as part of this investigation as a whole, some experimental techniques were used by way of providing further evidence and necessary additional data to these existing studies. The argument here being that there are indeed structures equivalent to frames in cognition that are manifested in visual and spatial structures in the layout of multimodal media texts; moreover these structures constitute important contextual cues in reader interaction. Furthermore, these structures are discernible through the adoption of some relatively simple experimental techniques described below, first by way of a brief critique of existing research and then through the application of some of our own methods.

The use of eye-tracking technology has become quite common in studies regarding the reading process in general (Rayner, 1998, Rayner and Duffy, 2001). Eye tracking ordinarily uses some form of video data from a camera

placed around a subject's head that is used to record eye movements as the subject of the experiment either scans a scene or, as in the case of our interest here, reads a document. What eye tracking does is to record the movements of the eye across a surface as the subject reads – each movement is called a saccade. The other important aspect of eye tracking is when the moments that the eye comes to rest on a particular point - known as fixations. These fixations are timed and this is called the “dwell time” (Wartenberg, 2005). It is a technique that has been applied in studies of the reading process as a way of establishing how a reader's eyes move across a text or, alternatively, in analysing the way that consumers scan more visually oriented media like print advertisements.

One of the most important and probably the most controversial issues here is that is assumed within the eye tracking paradigm that when a reader stops, that is when sufficient dwell time is recorded in the interaction, that some kind of thinking or cognitive processing is taking place. The interesting thing for us is that when a fixation occurs, this is likely to indicate the position of an entry point into the text. So that once we have taken away this reliance on there being cognitive activity such a tool as eye tracking becomes a good way of establishing the location of entry points in the text. That is to say that in much eye-tracking research a link is often made between the movements of the eye and some form of cognitive processing. Hence the expression, dwell time, indicating some form of processing or concentration. The problem thus becomes a matter how to establish forms of cognitive processing during interaction.

Eye tracking, in the area of “usability” testing – as in ways of establishing “ease of use” in software engineering and interface design - in web interface design has provided an important tool in web research studies and for the subsequent use of findings adopted into the design process. In the first instance, it enables the detailed analysis of readers' interaction and reading behaviour applied to online documents. It has more recently become a popular tool for recording and analysing reader interaction with online texts and with the consumption of news content in some cases. Whilst eye

tracking does enable detailed analysis of how readers of online content scan content and locate specific zones on a page, for example.

Stanford-Poynter: Eye tracking News Online

A long-term study had been set up by researchers at Stanford University and the Poynter Institute in the US and has used eye tracking to explore judgements about news consumption online (Outing and Ruel, 2004, 2006 and 2008). This research provides some important distinctions in relation to readers approach online media from the point of view of modality, the relations between text and graphics, and any bias towards specific areas of the text. The work suggests some important differences.

Some of their findings, if a little controversial, relate specifically to one of the issues being developed in this thesis, notably the relationship between image and text and assumed dominance of the visual in media texts. The main intention in using eye tracking in these studies was to establish where readers' eye go to and which sections of the page drew readers in, in the first instance. Entry points in this instance constitute the first spot at which eye rests on the screen.

As part of this research they observed that readers showed a strong preference in subjects towards text over graphics as entry points:

Dominant headlines most often draw the eye first upon entering the page - especially when they are in the upper left, and most often (but not always) when in the upper right. Photographs, contrary to what you might expect (and contrary to findings of 1990 Poynter eyetracking research on print newspapers), aren't typically the entry point to a homepage. Text rules on the PC screen -- both in order viewed and in overall time spent looking at it.

(Outing and Ruel, 2004).

As suggested in the quote this contradicts assumption frequently made about page design in that it is more often text and stories that actually draw readers in. This could be generalized further and, if put in the context of the discussion around “visual predominance” in Chapter Three, there would appear to be plenty of evidence here to at least begin to contradict what is said about the visual nature of new media in that, even if there is a predominance towards the use of images and the visual as a mode, in the design of texts, say on the web for example, here is an example that suggests that this does not actually distract people from the word and from the use of language and suggesting an important tension in the interaction between text and image. There is more to this – news and the dissemination of journalism is by its very nature dominated by written discourse. But, it does still point to less of a bias towards the image than many would expect.

In addition, the main task of this research was to establish the position of the most popular entry points into news online. So, when analysing reader’s interaction and specific aspects of their scanning of news pages they found that there was a bias towards the upper left hand-side of the page and tends to back up, in a performative way, the assertions made by Kress and van Leeuwen in relation to the left/right; given new/relation (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 186-192).

The eye most often fixated first in the upper left of the page and hovered in that area before going to the right. Only after perusing the top portion of the page for some time did their eyes explore further down the page. (Outing and Ruel, 2008)

This does tend to map onto general assumptions about patterns of scanning onto reading direction, that is, a bias towards left to right orientation in reading texts, such that this part of the study maintains this part of the argument about visual literacy whereby the spatial orientation of content towards the left establishes not only reading order but aspects of meaning

and association. Having said this, there was no intention within the Stanford/Poynter research to go beyond looking at these graphical and spatial phenomena associated with the interaction with news online. They did not look at subjects' preferences in reading specific sections or stories. As such they did not attempt to establish anything in relation to any underlying cognitive processing or the relationship between aspects of surface interaction, the spatial properties of the text and expectations. There is a relation drawn between to movement as of the eye and the layout of the page.

In spite of its apparent relevance, there are, however, some more general difficulties associated to the use of eye tracking as a technique as it has been adopted here. This is especially the case if we want to look a bit more deeply into the nature of what actually drives or motivates the choice of a particular entry point. There has to be some kind of decision made by the reader as to the nature of the content prior to reading it. That is the application of expectations and if we want to uncover this type of cognitive processing, or establish anything about the kinds of prior knowledge associated with the choice of a particular entry point or piece of content this cannot be established through eye-tracking alone. In addition, there is something distinctively 'un-naturalistic' about eye-tracking. For example, if the intention is to find experimental techniques that at mimic ordinary reading behaviour at the very least, the use of apparatus of the kind used in this type of experimental work will be a distraction.

As has been pointed out already there is no indication that there is a connection between the movements of the eyes when reading and the cognitive processing taking place at the same time. If we want to establish the existence of structures of expectation then eye tracking will only enable us to isolate those parts of the layout of the text that readers go to first and then, in addition, to any subsequent moves after this, say, for the construction of a reading path. Eye tracking will give us some very useful information about how readers identify entry points at a performative level, that is to say in terms of what readers actually do and how they perform in

particular tasks as has been established in Stanford/Poynter eye tracking studies. Eye tracking tends to assume that this is a passive process. But here the argument is that such a choice is framed within certain expectations about the nature of the content being displayed. Therefore, additional information from reader's interaction with texts has to be found to elicit some of the assumptions that are made about the content. It will not establish anything about the nature of the choice in the use of a particular entry point.

Lund University Study

Over the last few years researchers at Lund University Cognitive Science Department have been looking at how visual design and layout features influence reader behavior and they have done so from a distinctly cognitive perspective. Much of this work attempts a comparison between reading behavior with paper based news and what they call "NetNews". They have used a variety of techniques although eye tracking of reader behavior has been a central part of all of their studies (Holmqvist, K., 2003, Wartenberg, C., 2005, Holšánová, J., 2008). As a consequence these studies are, to some extent, conducted in a similar way as in the previous research only they have tended to supplement eye tracking with other tools, in particular, spoken protocols as participants as they work through each task. As such, these studies provide a somewhat different set of scenarios than in the Stanford/Poynter research by paying more attention to what readers do prior to arriving at an entry point their analysis tends to go further in terms of establishing in a more systematic way what constitutes either "reading" or "scanning" (Holmqvist, K., 2003) in the interaction as well as attempt to make some judgements about what motivates these behaviors and their connection with particular patterns of thought (Holmqvist, K., 2003)

Ultimately what they were trying to do was to establish whether reading behavior when interacting with news in print is different from that of reading on the web. Whilst very useful in terms of distinguishing different behaviors across the two different media, they did not look explicitly at the spatial characteristics, layout or composition of the pages in question, though they

did establish that when reading the participants' eyes tended to move across the pages of print in a zig-zag pattern (ibid.). In addition, they did separate pages into zones, however, use the examples of the two figures: 1: "areas coded according to their function and 2: Proportion of dwell time and transitions between areas.

The main distinction that they came up with in the research was that "scanning a newspaper is made in search of entry points..." (page 668). They also referred to the Poynter on page 668: who conclude that "we read deeper into texts we find in a net paper that we do in the newspaper. Since readers can be very selective in what they reading a et paper - by clicking only the links that interest them..." (page 668). This is interesting in relation to the study conducted in the next section, the assumption that more attention applied due to the fact that expectations and interest in the topic drives the experience of reading online.

Subsequent research by the same group has dealt even more specifically with the amount of dwell time associated with entry points. In addition, they refer specifically to aspects of the layout in both painted and web based new pages. Their initial research question is very useful in our context as it makes specific reference to page layout and the general spatial properties of these texts: "To what extent do local layout factors influence the visual behaviour of readers?" (Wartenberg, C., 2005: 2). Interestingly what they have also done in this later study has been to try to map the design decisions and the assumptions that designers make about reader's behavior onto actual interaction: again using eye tracking. Designers were asked to predict the order in which readers would attend to parts of the text and the amount of dwell time that readers attend to these areas. These judgements were then assessed in relation to readers assessed by comparing them to actual reading behaviour.

The concept of dwell time is useful here because this would seem to be a good way of determining the location of an entry point, if an entry point is an object that draws a reader into content and then to act on that content: i.e. to

begin reading.

“Dwell time: This parameter describes the percentage of time for which an AOI is attended in relation to the total observation time of the spread (defined as 100%).” (ibid: 3). Aoi refers to the “area of interest” and is established on the basis that if a reader stops at any point to consider the content in some way that, it is assumed, is something of interest even if the level of processing is superficial. In this study, on the basis of judgements made by designers the pages were divided into a total of 10 areas of interest (Aols). In addition, this study also tracked the, so called “scan path” of each participant. The scan path being the motion of the eye as it travels across the page.

It was found that designers’ predictions were pretty close to those of the readers that were analysed. But this is not the point. For the purpose of this chapter there are some very important distinctions coming to light here. First, we can adopt the concept of dwell time as something that will indicate the location of an entry point: added to this that an extended period of dwell time will indicate a special level of interest, and that this indicates a level of interest or motivation in relation to the content being considered. Thus we have established performative ways of indicating both entry points as well as reading paths in the interaction with texts. Second, there is clear experimental evidence that the pages of newspaper and with news online can be separated into distinctive areas of interest. This is particularly the case with newspaper design as we have seen in earlier chapters where pages are divided and subdivided into separate units, say for an image or for a story and its associated headline, graphics and so on.

Another key point here is the combination of the use of eye tracking and its use in establishing the validity of forms of semiotic analysis, in particular, the work of Kress and van Leeuwen and their approach to composition. What they established in this research was that “readers expect new information to be on the right of the page” in addition that “readers prefer general information to be at the top and specific information on the bottom (Holsanova, J., 2006: 70-71). Whilst it may be problematic to map the finding

of this research directly onto the distinctions made about composition by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), in the first instance they do not really consider “preferences” in terms of reading, semiotics and visual design, and am I sure that this is not what Kress and van Leeuwen would have actually intended when referring to the “meaning of composition”, their approach works from the point of view of meaning making and ideology, however, it is interesting to note, again in this performative manner and tracking actual reader behaviour that there are specific regularities dividing the pages up into horizontal and vertical structures.

... newspaper readers do not read in the ordinary sense. Rather they scan the spread looking for entry points. When they have found an interesting entry point, they stop scanning and start reading a while. After a while, scanning is resumed until the next interesting entry point is found (Holsanova, J., 2006: 75).

This sounds remarkably similar to the following: “Screens have points of entry; traditional pages do not. [...] this is to say that in screens the point of entry is a problematic issue” (Kress, 2003: 136).

The problem is that, whilst many of these surveys suggest that there is a link between the movements of the eye and cognition, the details are not fully established in relation to the kinds of thinking that is going on. Nor is mental processing linked to any specific reading task. That is to say, we are still yet to establish when the application of thinking or mental processing occurs and is applied. If the intention is to establish, as in the case of Tannen’s work with spoken discourse, the link between a specific action or behavior and some underlying process, framing, that is, we need to devise methods that can account for this on empirical grounds.

The question still remains, is there any evidence to suggest that there are structures of expectation, similar to those indicated by Tannen in language the function at the cognitive level and are manifested in the visual design and spatial organisation of multimodal media texts?

A Reader Interaction Survey

The basic research questions posed at the beginning of the chapter are relevant here as we attempt to apply specific research tools intended at least begin to answer them.

First, how much of the reader's gaze is directed by the nature, structure and visual design in the presentation of content, that is, as a direct result of the visual design and layout of an online document such as the front page of an online newspaper? Second, how much of the reader's gaze is directed by prior knowledge, interests and expectations about the nature of the content?

In order to be more specific in relation to particular salient layout elements we need to add to these subsequent questions about the spatial qualities of multimodal texts.

1. What specific content elements constitute "entry points" and where are they located on the page?
2. Is it possible to establish regularities in interaction that suggest a bias to any specific location or zone on the page?

This part of the research was conducted very much in the spirit of testing out the techniques themselves. That is, seeing if there are alternative ways of looking at reader performance to eye-tracking, for example. Or, to establish whether techniques that integrate performance with semiotics can actually establish any new findings in relation to the spatial organisation of content in the composition of pages: printed and online. Framing is still very much in the foreground here in the sense that we are still attempting to establish regularities in the spatial organisation of content and as such as part of the framing of content in terms of composition. This, most importantly, is then mapped onto the framing in terms of expectations and prior knowledge. Further, another overriding intention here is to establish experimental

techniques that will enable us to observe the types of visual literacy that is afforded by the use of screen based representation such as new discourse as it is presented on the web and therefore to begin to test some of the assertions made with regard to the “new visual literacy” espoused by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 21-33).

So, whilst many of the results may occur to be provisional they are for the most part intended to contribute to an on-going critique of visual literacy set up in Chapter Three as well as an on-going critique of the research methods used to establish aspects of visual literacy – both descriptive and naturalistic.

An Integrated Task

A series of simple tasks were designed to establish the kind of prior knowledge and information that readers bring to bear on their reading of media texts on-screen. The tasks were undertaken by a small number of well-informed postgraduate students and lecturers drawn from a variety of media related disciplines, all of whom had indicated that they were regular readers of news online. The majority of participants had technical interests and expertise and a great deal of familiarity with technology.

Three main instruments were used that together form an integrated task that together was intended to yield information about salient aspects of the interaction.

- A questionnaire on general assumptions about news consumption
- An interaction task that had readers navigate in as natural a way as possible through a series of pages of the on-line version of US today
- A facilitated discussion using a focus group composed of the same people as those taking the interaction task.

It was assumed that data from each would be brought together to yield information that would at least begin to shed light on the questions above. In addition, the use of was intended to provide useful information in attempt the

evaluate the facility of these techniques to contribute to a more general discussion on framing and expectation relating to types of news content and the manner of their display and composition.

The questionnaire was essentially used to establish the background, interests and preferences and medium used by news readers. It asking them make to distinctions between their consumption of either paper or web-based. This was a more general survey than the rest of the tasks as contributions were sought from a variety of people – a total of 45.

The interaction task that described and analysed below, was intended to give some insights into the performance of individual participants and in particular

The focus group, all of whom had completed the questionnaire and participated in the interaction task were engaged in an open discussion about general issues relating their news consumption as well as providing details of how they thought the task itself had gone including an evaluation of the efficacy of the experiment itself.

The first part of this experiment, then, was in the form of a brief questionnaire used chiefly to enable the simple profiling of reading preferences and asking what were participants preferred source of news; give estimates of the amount of content they read on the front page; if at any point they read an entire story. Basic demographic information regarding participant's background was also sought. The main findings of the questionnaire was that a majority of respondents do regularly use the web as a news source and in many instances more than print, but that TV and radio are also a preferred method of news consumption used in combination with web and paper versions of newspapers.

For the main experimental task – the interaction task - each participant was provided with a single page, the front page a specific edition of *USAToday* online (18th June 2004), on a laptop computer screen display and asked to “think-aloud”. Think-aloud protocols are a specific technique in HCI and in usability studies (Ericson and Simon, 1993) where subjects speak out about

their intentions and give their reasoning regarding the interaction. Comments from each participant was recorded onto a voice recorder.

Whilst participants browsed or read the pages of the website, using a printed copy of the same front page of the online edition each of the participant's moves across the screen was recorded onto a transparent overlay placed on top of the printed page. In this way participant's initial entry points were marked on the transparent sheet with a pen. As participants continued to both read and browse the text each subsequent move was recorded on a chart (see appendix 2) identifying the spatial location of each entry point and then any subsequent points where a click of the mouse was made and the where reader moves on to study new content. There is an important distinction here as any move made by the participant subsequent to an entry point would suggest a path in the interaction and details of the page accessed and the location of points in the path were taken to the first three moves along the reading path. Whether the entry point was image or text was also recorded on the transparent overlay. A total of eight readers in total took part in the interaction task. Each was presented with the same page of the *USAToday*.

Entry Points and Reading Order

The illustration shows how each interaction was recorded. The location of an entry point was recorded using a cross parked with a coloured pen. The order of each of these points was recorded by simply giving each on a number. These are indicated in the illustration with a cross and the number next to indicates the order, the first three steps were recorded in each case. The illustration shows three separate episodes superimposed to show what it looks like when the data is brought together. All entry points are clustered along a diagonal line between the top left and centre and towards the middle of the page.

More often than not participants would land on a navigational element. Clearly at this top level of the site the majority of the content elements are of this kind. The main variation being whether elements are pictorial, textual, in the form of clauses such as headlines or simpler textual units such as the labels for sections, as in the coloured sidebar at the top left of the page.

Just in these three there is a remarkable level of variation inconsistency evidenced in the distribution of entry points across the top part of the screen.



Fig 5.2: Recording Entry Points, Reading Order and Type of Content Element

Each entry point and subsequent moves were also recorded and analysed in terms of the type of content that each consisted of.

Link	image	Type					Scroll		
no	image	caption	headline	summary	story		L	S	Read
1			x						

byp.

Link	image	Type					Scroll		
no	image	caption	headline	summary	story		L	S	Read
2	x							✓	✓

Link	image	Type					Scroll		
no	image	caption	headline	summary	story		L	S	Read
3			x				✓		

index.

Link	image	Type					Scroll		
no	image	caption	headline	summary	story		L	S	Read

Link	image	Type					Scroll		
no	image	caption	headline	summary	story		L	S	Read

Link	image	Type					Scroll		
no	image	caption	headline	summary	story		L	S	Read

Fig 5.3 Capturing each move in the interaction, text or image.

Each section of table needed to indicate specific moment in the interaction. So, on the far left of the table is a cell relating to simply the when a participant has clicked on a link - a number is placed in the cell, so if it's the first link then the number one would be put into this cell. Next to this are a series of cells that are all divided into four, this are listed as: image, caption, headline, summary or story. The four segments relate to the position of the element on the page, so that where ever the link or content element is it will be located in one of these four quadrants. To the right of the table is where information about scrolling - whether long or short or whether the participant has read any of the content in a linear manner.

This structure was used for both print and web. But in the case of print, participants attempted to complete the tables themselves and this was done with a short initial brows of three national daily newspapers. For the web interaction, participants just went along interacting with the site whilst their moves were recorded by me and an assistant. In addition to recording what each participant was saying out loud into voice recorder. As already stated the important thing here was to record whether there are any spatial consistencies with initial interaction on the web and if this was the case, what type of content? and where this content was located. Then it was a question of establishing where participants landed in terms of content: again, the most important information here was noting the location of the content and its type.

Evaluation

This was a brief experiment conducted on a relatively small sample. But already it is evident that it is necessary to establish a more direct link between the more local questions in posed in this chapter with regard to the location of specific entry points and the more general ones relating to the position of the gaze and the role of composition in directing it. It is also necessary to 'drill down' even further and have even more specific questions relating to the medium and in particular to individual content elements.

In terms of making general statements about framing, the following comes into play:

1. What is the communicative function of specific content elements (for example, specific form of type on the page)?
2. What do they do, what are they used for?

In addition, the function of each element needs to be presented in terms of pragmatics, in terms of what each element actually does and probably more to the point what readers do with each element, how the elements inform or

constrain action. They are pragmatic because they are very specific and unambiguous. They are also pragmatic because they are about action and what people actually do; in relation to the use of specific content elements.

Other studies do not make a clear distinction between entry points as the first item of content on the page that readers dwell up on and, alternatively, the active use of links, which could be an important function for an entry point. So there is a problem here simply over how we define entry points in a consistent way or at least one can incorporate both dwelltime and the active use of content either in the form of reading the associated text or by clicking on a link to move to other content. With eye tracking only the first point at which the reader dwells on the content that is accounted for. In the current survey, though observation of the interaction entry point was associated with the point at which the reader clicked on a link.

After all participants had completed the simple navigation exercise above and navigated through a few pages of the *USAToday* website they were all brought together into a discussion forum.

The majority of the issues addressed were related to their performance in the interaction task, judgements about the relevance and efficacy of the tasks themselves, and any general issues regarding their consumption of online news and in particular what motivates their interest or choice in terms of content, topics or subject matter. This discussion turned out to have more of an impact on the study than originally bargained for. Originally placed in the schedule of tasks as a de-briefing session, this, more than any other aspect of the research gave well-informed information about some of the judgments that participants applied to their interaction. Notes were taken by someone employed to assist in this. A complete transcript of this discussion is not available. But participants gave a lot of information about the type of content that was sought, informed by interest and topicality, both in the experimental context and in general when reading news online.

The following salient points emerged from the discussion. Searching is more goal oriented, as opposed to browsing, which tends to indicate a more passive relation between reader and content. This distinction is emphasised especially when applied to the specific context of news reading. When reading news online it is driven usually by interest in a specific topic and is unlike reading content in paper form as it is more specific and participants are likely to have more preconceived idea about what content they are looking for. It was once the case when there is a major event in world news content is usually received in more conventional media (e.g. radio or TV) but is followed up and gone into more depth using online media. This is clearly no longer the case. An important point here with respect to searching for content on line is that interaction in general was learned and that readers get used to how to interact with specific sites and become accustomed to the location of content especially if they regularly search for similar types of content.

In general this study has provided further evidence for the existence of entry points as well as for subsequent reading paths. But, there is some difficulty in how the term entry point is used. Does an entry point merely indicate the very first location at which the reader stops scanning the text and begins interacting with the content? Or, is it the active use of a feature in the content? There is a distinction, therefore, that needs to be made between reading and navigation, between the perusal of content and its active use through the structure of the site.

Associated to this is the fact that the choice of an entry point is context-driven and suggests the application of expectations by readers in their interaction. All participants indicated that they were searching for specific content usually based on a single topic or even story. This means that their choice of content and their choice of entry points are driven by participants at least having some pre-conceived ideas about the content prior to interaction.

The choice of a particular entry point, it is argued, and this came through in discussion, is context-driven and at least in part determined by the kinds of

prior knowledge and therefore expectations that readers apply to the reading of a given text. Readers go to news on the web with a particular subject or topic in mind. A key part of the choice of a particular entry point is based on assumptions made about the nature of the content that is likely to be found at this point and by following the link in the text attached to it.

Most important of all, there are aspects of the choice of a particular entry point that occurs prior to actually interacting with the content and that these are driven by assumptions and choices made by readers as to the nature of the content that they might expect at this point. This is important because it indicates clearly that there is a link between the entry points, its location and the expectations that a reader applies to the interaction with the text.

In this sense there is a link between entry points and contextual information that is provided outside of the visual frame but nonetheless related to aspects of composition and layout and thus connected to framing in visual terms.

Was there any consistency with regard to the location of entry points? The initial entry points landed on clearly show a bias towards the left hand of the page and above the centre line of the page. In addition to this nearly all participants focused on briefs and headlines as their first entry point and these, for the most part, were subsequently followed as links to other pages. Additional findings important to the argument here is that there is some doubt about the primary role played by images and graphics in the process of choice of entry point and that, as a consequence of choices about content being made prior to interaction – expectations – that it is more often than not textual content and a preoccupation with a specific topic or story, and it is this that has readers navigate to a specific location on the page. This indicates the primary function of the text and in particular the use of briefs in online news stories over and above the use of graphics as a draw for readers towards specific items of content. This finding is reinforced by the Stanford/Poynter survey as the same point has been made in these earlier studies [3]. “As we observed subjects moving into their selected pages, we

observed a strong preference for text over graphics as entry points". Their findings give evidence for a "margin of nearly two to one favouring text entry points. This is still an issue of some controversy.

There are also some important differences here between the web versions of the front pages and their paper-based counterparts. It is argued that in reading news on the web is more a matter of readers knowing the topic and type of story that they wish to access than is the case with reading the paper-based version. In fact, it is more likely that readers would potentially use a variety of sites and access them in a topic-oriented way, rather than with the frequent use of a single publication that is the usual habit for readers of paper based news. However, the fact that so much news reading is topic-oriented actually points to some similarities shared in the design of both media forms. Perhaps this is to be expected. For example on the front page of *USAToday* section are listed in a prominent point at the top left-hand side of the page. These section heading usually map directly onto the physical sections to be found in the paper-based version. Sections and the topic-oriented presentation of the news is a fundamental part of the structure of the design of new content in any medium, but are the mainstay of paper-based editions.

Conclusion

There are some issues here in relation to modality that is well worth emphasising by way of a conclusion to the chapter. Modality, or more specifically the modal relations evident in the texts, occurs not just in relation to the management of the interaction between image and text distinction, though this is significant. The results in the interaction task also indicate that proximity remains a critical aspect in how readers use the text, but that this is also partly controlled by interest; either in the nature and subject matter of the content; or through the requirements of navigation. Further, that this is much less through the similarity in the visual appearance of individual layout

elements. This function of design elements needs to be acknowledged as they are both important aspects of the creation of meaning in the text that do not necessarily come through when using the semiotic approach. If it can be reliably assumed that the most popular location on the front page is at a specific location, then this suggests that its proximity to other elements is also relatively consistent in the layout and composition of the page. This usefully expands the social semiotic use of framing and proximity.

To add to this, whilst it has been acknowledged that one of the functions of framing is that of orienting the reader (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1986: 130-135) the way that this characterisation of the position and location of the viewer we can no apply concrete evidence that this is the case. It is indicated from much of the evidence presented in this chapter that that the actual location and motion of the body is itself oriented and managed through framing.

A final point needs to be emphasised. The material presented in this chapter and the previous one are not intended to be a rejection of social semiotics. There is much that is useful and that can be taken further both in theoretical terms as well as in relation to methodology. In fact, there are issues raised in this chapter that can be used to reinforce what was established earlier on in the thesis. Entry points and reading paths clearly have an important role to play in interaction. They are clearly an important aspect of both old and new media forms. In addition, they are, at least in part governed by proximity and, therefore, by the type of framing that was established in Chapter Three. There, we say that framing and proximity gave rise to the clustering of visual elements into grouping, as well as separated by the use of framelines. An important impact of this kind of framing was seen to be the ordering and timing of messages. In addition, there is still the question of whether there is any bias towards specific zones within the text. Whilst there may not be enough evidence to support either the prevalence of any specific types of orientation at the level of composition - left to right, top to bottom, centre and margin - there is enough evidence to indicate that 'weight' towards specific zones of the screen in the case of online news can be established.

Furthermore, that this can be aligned with how readers actually use texts. And this is supported by what readers 'think', or at least say what they think during interaction. But the two go hand in hand. There are elements of the design of media texts that support particular readings or sequences of interaction. But these have to be seen in relation to what readers bring to the text, even prior to the interaction itself in the form of judgments and expectation applied to the event.

How does the cognitive emphasis sit with the social semiotic? The answer to this is that they are in no way mutually exclusive. As has been suggested in the previous paragraph, there are some similarities in their findings. The difficulty is in attempting to integrate these two very different ways of characterising and deploying framing as an approach to the interpretation of media texts. There does not seem to be a way of directly mapping framing in compositional terms with the types of framing discussed in this and the previous chapter. Having said this, the work undertaken in the previous sections has been an opportunity to look at the actual use of semiotic resources in situ and on this basis has been very worthwhile and in doing so has in fact reinforced some of the distinctions made in social semiotics, through the application of proximity to interaction, which is another way of saying modal relations.

Chapter Six

Framing: The Body and Augmented Space

Introduction

This chapter deals with a range of issues related to embodiment within, so called, “augmented space” (Manovich, 2006) and “augmented public space” (Allen, 2008). This is a specific site for the consumption of new media in urban space that, it is argued, is of growing importance in the landscape of new media. Research associated with augmented spaces is still developing and has yet to be fully articulated, either in terms of any approaches to theory or of any concrete application. However it has tended to encompass at least one of the following three strategies in terms of research into ways of explaining the increasing integration of architecture, communications technology and the various forms of display technology, from the everyday use small-scale, hand-held devices to the use of large-scale media displays in public events and spectacle:

1. Urban planners and architects employ computer generated three-dimensional displays, using either “virtual” or “augmented reality” to extend more conventional ways of constructing plans for urban spaces. An example of this is MIT’s “Augmented Urban Planning Workbench” (Ishii *et al.* 2002).
2. The integration of real-world architecture in urban spaces that has superimposed onto it forms of electronic display technology, for example, the type of research and exhibitions that can be seen at events such as the Media Architecture Biennale , Arrus, Denmark (Allen, 2012) and previously at the Urban Screens Association events (Allen, 2008 and 2010).

3. This can take the form of big screens in city centres, examples of which will be discussed later; forms of digital signage and information displays. Added to this are other forms of information and content consumed in an urban context, especially media content received by individuals using mobile communications devices.
4. It relates to ideas concerning the overlapping of media content - the 'media layer' - can be extended to encompass other forms of display and communications technology leading to forms of interaction that interrupts, or transforms, the experience of the urban space, it can link them to virtual spaces beyond the one that they are located and to forms of public space that have no real perceivable boundary.

This chapter will deal specifically with the second and third of the above, as both relate specifically to the issues raised in the thesis regarding framing and in particular as a way of extending what has already been discussed in relation to proximity and related to the experience of particular forms of media representation in the urban setting. It also has a bearing upon how the image and visuals can be related to theoretical issues of embodiment; as such it will also establish some of the multimodal characteristics of these relatively new urban phenomena. It looks at the way that the experience of the urban is being transformed; the role of the body within that; and eventually which aspects of multimodality can be integrated into the analysis of these new spaces and in terms of framing in particular. The body, it will be seen is a key to understanding framing. Framing, it will be seen, is both an inherently multimodal phenomenon and as a key way of interpreting the role of not only the use of visuals in communication, but the way that the body is seen as crucial role played by the body in reception and to transformations in the experience of urban spaces.

Rationale

Before continuing it is necessary to provide a rationale for what be seen as another change in direction. In the previous chapter, concerns were voiced in relation to the empirical methods used to establish navigation sequences and how these appeared to make sense for the subjects. Here, it was suggested, there is a possible criticism of the approach taken because, in its attempts to capture aspect of reading order and navigation through the observation of reading behaviour, these methods can, at times, appear to be somewhat unnatural in their application. For example, subjects were asked to “read-aloud” and were consequently made aware of their own thought processes. This, contrary to its intention of seeking a naturalistic way of looking at meaning making, may actually have had the opposite outcome, by removing this behaviour from its ‘natural’ context. That is, subjects were made aware of the process of reading rather than reading without this additional reflective content.

In addition, back in the first three chapters, framing was characterised in relation to a particular approach to visual design in the production of meaning in composition, a particular way of doing semiotics. But here, a critique was established on the basis that framing constitutes a set of internal boundaries to the image. Further, that the consequence of this was that it gave rise to a rather limited function of framing within multimodal communication in general. That is, to characterise framing from the point of view of the meaning making potential of multimodal texts, reduces its capacity as a way of managing or constraining elements within the text to the application of a set of internal spatial properties. However, in Kress (2010) an expanded definition of framing is given, one that includes some of the thinking from Goffman’s original formulation, as frames of reference. But, still the main function of frames is to either separate or divide content, or alternatively, to connect and join together related items of content (Kress, 2010: 149-153). This is the case, whatever the mode through which meaning is realised. But, it is argued, this newer version of framing does not account for what is being

attempted in this chapter, which is to see framing as ultimately to do with the body of the viewer.

Having said this, the main source of dissatisfaction in the thesis so far is much more do with the inability to integrate the concept of framing consistently across the two case studies presented earlier - particularly in Chapters Three and Five where empirical methods were used and interrogated - and as a consequence, this inadequacy is evident, so far, across the thesis as a whole. It could easily be argued that framing, as it has been discussed up to this point, still exhibits very different characteristics across the different fields of study to which it has been aligned, and across the different disciplines that have been referred to, social semiotics aspects of cognition, for example. That said, the use of framing in these earlier chapters had initially enabled a useful distinction to be made between content (visual semiotics, Kress and van Leeuwen, for example) and context (cognition and interaction, Tannen) in the interpretation of multimodal texts. But a distinction that now turns out to be flawed. In each case the methods chosen do in themselves present ways of solving difficult methodological problems, on the one hand, establishing the meaning making potential of framing in associated media texts, on the other hand, devising ways of recording key moves in readers' interaction with media texts. However, in both approaches it can be argued that framing, in the way that it has been applied in each of those case studies, amounts to the presentation of both content and context simultaneously and might essentially be seen as opposite sides of the same coin, so to speak. So, whilst some of the characteristics that constitute each of these two different ways of defining framing may actually be somewhat different, they are related, at times the frame is an element in the design as well as a structure that determines the associations attached to what is inside the frame. In semiotics, the use of framing established key aspects of the spatial arrangement of elements within a composition. In interaction, it has the potential at least, to substantiate key moves made by readers, though their use of navigation paths in their interaction with a texts meaning and assumptions derived from

this, for example, as a consequence of an element's relative location and position.

Two events occurred during the course of the research that meant that this newer material seemed appropriate. The first of these events came from the creation of a contribution to a book by the researcher, *Augmented Urban Spaces* (Aurigi, 2008), which meant that some new ideas about the use of media technologies; aspects of space in an urban context and the use of framing were developed, which, in part, were derived from the research in the previous two chapters. Second, for a number of years the researcher had been involved in creating work with a group of visual artists in a collaborative project, known as *The Bradford Grid*, and at the time of writing, this project was beginning to produce work that was of direct relevance, not only to some of these new ideas, but in relation the thesis as a whole; this work could easily provide a further source of visual evidence to support some of the claims made in the earlier part of the thesis; it could be used to account for important transformations in the communications landscape; transformations relating to the experience of the urban. Thus, not only did this new work give rise to some alternative ways of characterising framing, it also seemed to fit well in the broader argument about media transformations and the migration of media content into the everyday experience of the urban.

Embodiment

Another way of expressing the concerns set out in the previous section is that the body of the viewer is missing in the work presented so far and the more ground that this investigation covers; the more the importance of the body in interpretation becomes evident. The body is critical to the development into the new spaces discussed in this chapter. The body's relation to the space around it and specifically how the body traverses forms of urban space has been used by many visual artists who have worked with aspects of the built environment and fused this with their own forms of media art. For example, Lozano-Hemmer's series of interventions in urban space called *Relational Architecture*, (Munster, 2006) where participants are

incorporated into projections that are displayed on the side of large buildings and through this given ways to move and interact with the space in novel surprising ways. The use of the built environment in this, rather than creating interfaces for participants to interact with, situations and happenings are created that allow participants to engage with both the projections and though the position and location of the body provide a way of forging intimate connecting between the body and the urban environment. Sculptor Jaume Plense's work for the *Crown Fountain* in Chicago is another example (Allen, 2012) where civic spaces have been given over to artworks that facilitate novel ways for inhabitants to use the space, to interact with it, and move within it. In addition, both examples, in many respects, exemplify augmented urban spaces. These examples whilst setting up highly playful environments in urban space also relate directly to framing in the sense that participants in these interactions are placed within the real spaces of the city but interact with a variety of virtual representations simultaneously. Similar in many respects to the example that follows (Fig. 6.1). The argument is that the body actually needs to be placed at the centre of our thinking. That once we begin to conceptualise the role of the body in interaction, *in situ*, within its locality, a further set of issues come to light and these are movement, mobility and the actual motion of the body of the viewer in space and the actual experience of mobility as a key component in the process of interpretation. Both of the brief examples given above are artworks that invite participants and passers-by to engage with the space and move around in it as a form of exploration of the body and its relation to its surroundings. The examples discussed in the following sections will identify some of these properties in association with the use of forms of media art in urban and public space and especially where embodiment and the position and location of the body of the viewer become central to our concerns.

Therefore, before continuing with the last brief case study it is necessary to give an overview of the development of ideas in relation to the body, embodiment and aspects of the phenomenological approaches from which these ideas are derived. It will be seen that framing, once again, becomes an central guiding concept when thinking about the body in relation to media

consumption. Phenomenological approaches to meaning tend to be focused on the “lived experience of the body” and the “sensory acquisition” (Institute of Education, 2013) of cultural information, forms and concepts as emerging phenomena. As such, they force the researcher to look ever more closely into the situated and in many respects the contextual nature of our understanding of interaction, subjectivity and meaning. It could be argued that these approaches facilitate a more subtle and nuanced interpretation of context and far greater emphasis on experience and the coming into being of concepts with which we articulate that understanding; rather than the forms of observation that underpin more directly empirical approaches, such as those presented in the two previous case studies in the thesis. That is to say that there is a very different approach to evidence and the overall argument. As an approach it analyses the situation in which interactions occur. Often from the point of view of the participant and how they experience the space. It is similar in some respects to social semiotics and there may indeed be ways of connecting these approaches, but the object of study is somewhat different.

Historically, phenomenological approaches, and the focus on the body as the site for interpretation, initially grew out of the work of Husserl’s philosophy and existentialism and developed further in the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1962). These approaches see the body itself as the site of meaning making and central to the reception of images. In the study of film, for example, initial ideas in the work of Henri Bergson in *Matter and Memory* (2007) first published in 1912, then adopted by Deleuze (1986), have taken the emphasis of meaning away from the text, and consequently representation, as the site for reception and meaning, to embodiment. In more recent work in visual studies rather than looking at interaction with texts or with tools and devices the emphasis has been on subjectivity and how the perceiving subject is revealed as a crucial component in the creation of meaning. That is that the creation of meaning does not reside within the text, but through its processing by the “affective”, the reactive, visceral experience that is created by the sensory apparatus, by the body and its experience of immediately perceived events and happenings (Massumi, 2002 and Hansen, 2004).

Recent examples of where embodiment has been incorporated into multimodal research have developed potentially new ways of analysing the use of mobile, devices and communications technologies in educational settings (Price and Jewitt, 2013). Embodied interaction was examined through observation. Moves made by participants in classroom interactions were recorded and transcripts made of video data. Here interaction is embodied in the sense that the approach taken in this research attempt to establish how meaning making occurs specifically within the context of use, and through the actual use of tools and artefacts *in situ*, in the very act of making meaning, with a focus on embodied interaction with the tools used and how the body is the receiver of information, cues and consequently meaning in these very specific moments of interaction use of tools and devices. Both the location of interaction and the immediate bodily and contextual aspects of interaction and the subsequent creation of meaning through the body as a receiver of that information is analysed.

The emphasis in both of these contexts, in visual studies and in multimodal research, is to put the emphasis on how the perception of the object comes into being, more specifically, on the means through which perception of an object or image is possible, through the emergence of our understanding of the world around us and the objects that are used in order to create this understanding. Both the experience of the world outside the body and the emergence of images of that world and in this sense, experience, and hence meaning, is mediated by the body. The body is the centre of meaning making.

There are some important consequences in the use of theories of embodiment: first is an almost complete rejection of the existence of the text in interpretation and, as such, it provides something of an alternative to semiotics. Whilst not being a complete rejection of semiotic approaches, it does force the researcher to take the focus of attention away from the text as the primary object of study and by doing so bring into question the validity of the kinds of evidence that is provided in support of aspects of multimodality, with its emphasis on textually. For example, semiotics insists on the “materiality of the text” (Kress, 2003, 2010) as the object that give rise to the

semiotic resources that afford meaning making. Embodiment, on the other hand, would indicate that it is through the *materiality of the body*, through the apparatus of the senses that is the site for meaning making. Second, whilst the most recent case study in the previous chapter did look at some of the situated aspects of interaction, at least by implication and the attempt was made to establish meaning in relation to assumptions and expectation that readers applied to the media in question, through embodiment, and in particular, through “affect” (Hansen, 2003), takes the work presented here into an entirely new space, that is, the emphasis is now on how the body is moved, the focus shifts from cognition to processes that might be considered as pre-cognitive, responses to stimuli, motion, action, responses that actually presuppose thinking, or cognitive processing.

In essence, this new focus on embodiment captures two phenomena that are of interest in what follows and are both forms of embodiment that can be defined as forms of framing. Embodiment captures the body and its relations to its surrounding, the lived experience and the situated aspects of interaction and subjectivity. Embodiment has a further set of meanings especially appropriate to visual studies and this is embodiment as an image of something, one that encapsulates, or embodies, particular properties, that cause the coming into being of ideas and concepts, for example.

Framing, Embodiment and New Media

There are two versions of Peter Aeschermann’s installation, *Augenblike*, (Fig 6.1) one where the work is projected onto a screen on an internal wall of an art gallery (2004), where participants interact with the piece inside a building, and another, later version of the same work, instead this time the video signal is projected onto an external screen, in public space, where viewers, participants, passers-by, walk into the space in front of the screen outside in the street. In the second example a video signal is delivered directly to an LCD screen, that is, the screen is illuminated with no projection. This latter version was presented as part of a festival of similar artwork created specifically to be displayed on large scale urban screens, at the Urban

Screens conference Manchester 2007. This example is of particular relevance to us and serves as a useful introduction to what is presented in the rest of this chapter. It brings together many aspects of the body, interaction, framing, augmentation, and the experience of the urban into one example. The relevance of this example is in its direct use of the space that surrounds it and the way that it fixes the body in space, and through this the way in which the body has a direct function in the realisation of the piece, in addition to the affective relations that are evident when the participant experiences the work. This installation also exemplifies significant issues in relation to proximity and, as such, is used here to integrate the concepts of framing and proximity with the body and examples of new media used to engage with aspects of the urban experience.

When no-one is in the space around this installation, the bodies represented on the screen are static and standing with their backs to the space outside the screen. As soon as a participant enters the space, the bodies on screen begin to move. A motion tracking device is fixed to the top of the screen and tracks the movements of passers-by. As viewers in the vicinity of the screen move around the space, the bodies projected onto the screen also begin to move; they turn and stare at the viewer. Intermittently, a bird will fly across the screen. But the movements of the bodies represented on the screen are controlled by the motion of the participants moving around the space in front of the screen. There is a direct correlation here between the motion of the body of the participant and the motion of the bodies represented on screen. On experiencing this installation, it produces an uncanny, unreal and rather disorientating effect on the viewer. On the one hand, the participant is connected to the images on the screen in a virtual sense in that the motion of their body is in a direct relation to the motion of the bodies on screen. On the other hand, and this is what produces the sense of disorientation, there is a distinct lack of connection between the body in the space around the screen and those projected onto it. This creates a disconnection, a sense of alienation, of being observed: an affective response producing a feeling of disconnection and hostility that is perceived on seeing the bodies on screen.



Fig. 6.1 *Augenblicke*: by Peter Aerschmann (installation demonstrated at the Urban Screens 2007 Conference, Manchester – photo by the author).

Framing here can operate at a number of levels on the basis of what has developed in the thesis so far, each of which overlap. Proximity is established through not just the closeness and distance of the represented bodies on screen, but in the relation between them and the bodies of participants in the space around the screen. In this way proximity is operating at a number of levels. The viewer's proximity to the screen activates the installation and alters the nature of the display and in turn transforms both the nature of the interaction and the emotional response to the bodies represented. The bodies turn and move towards the observer and then away again, first engaging the viewer then disengaging from them. Proximity through closeness and distance here is being manipulated by the movements of the viewer as well as in the motion of the represented bodies

on screen (Hodge and Kress, 1994:52). The viewer is drawn in and then turned away and this engagement is managed through proximity in the position of the viewer in relation to the screen, in the closeness or distance between the represented bodies and the viewer.

The issue here is the directness of the relation between the represented bodies and those of the participants here that signify real and affective properties that arise as a consequence of framing and the overlapping of composition and the movement of the body in space. This is important as it suggests a much more complex potential for framing in composition. Not just into the space beyond the screen but also in relation to the position and location of the viewer and the consequent reaction that is caused by this in the viewer. Furthermore, there could easily be a further association that is, with both place and locality in the sense argued here; that framing can be further scaled out beyond the screen and into the space within which the body is located. That is to say that there is clearly potential for framing to determine important phenomena relating to the sense of place, of location, and the potential meaning attached to the position of the body in space.

We have seen, especially in chapter three, that framing binds aspects of the represented spaces with the real spaces experienced in the social world. This was evident in the concept of “proxemics” (Hodge and Kress, 1988). The closer that an element is in the design and composition of a space is to another, the likelier it is that both elements will be seen as being related. They become connected purely on the basis of their proximity to each other. It is in this sense that the spatial properties of multimodal texts can be seen to be bound with forms of human and social action.

This was the position initially taken by Hodge and Kress (1988) whereby the closeness and distance of represented objects map directly onto those of the social world:

Non-closeness normally signifies weakness, indifference, or alienation in a relationship. Closeness, however, signifies a strong relationship which can be either positive (love, intimacy) or negative (aggression, hostility), Closeness, on its own thus carries a contradiction. (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 52 – 53).

It is suggested here that the application of proximity to the understanding of augmented spaces and the overlapping of media technologies and the built environment developed in this chapter may well be a fruitful one. Especially once we place the body centre of interaction. Furthermore, this has been something of a theme running throughout the thesis; whereby the relative position of bodies in space indicates specific forms of social relation. Further, that proximity, and the spatial relation that arise in consequence, constitute way of establishing “affective” relations that occur. Exactly those affective reactions that occurred when confronted by works such as *Augenblike* and the reaction to the piece on entering into the space and the impact of one’s own motion in the space, the consequent movement of the represented bodies and the response that this gives rise to.

The Bradford Grid

Many urban screens in the UK, similar to that discussed in the previous example, have been used for the presentation of artistic content and to encourage participation by local inhabitants. For example, the *Bradford Grid* is a visual arts project using artists who either live or work in the Bradford region. In essence, the Project is a long term survey of the region’s urban environment and to date has produced a substantial archive of both still and video images as well as sound recordings. The Project was established in 2003 and set to continue on a long-term basis. One of the central principles of the Project is the use of a map as a way of governing how members of the Project Team engage with the locality. A map of the Bradford region is cut into squares and, on a regular basis, individual squares are chosen at random and each member of the team visits the area represented and

records, in their own chosen style, salient aspects of the urban environment. The map is used in an arbitrary way to govern how that Project members perambulate and navigate around the space of the city and how each member of the team individually creates responses to their experience of the space. In this way, especially given the duration of the Project, transformations in the urban scene, particularly relevant as the region itself which is undergoing regeneration and major shifts in urban planning, are recorded using a variety of modes, still photography, video, sound recordings and written responses to the urban scene.

On many occasions the project has been commissioned to produce installation work based on the output from the locality, spaces around the Bradford's city centre. On one of these occasions, the immediate vicinity around the screen was used as a focal point and displayed as part of a contemporary arts festival.

One of the creative strategies employed in the production of this installation work was that it had to make reference to the way that inhabitants use the space in order for it to work and involved constructing a series of short video pieces none of which lasted for more than three minutes. Interestingly, this duration for each episode was based on an estimate of how long it takes for an average user of the space to perambulate through it, including a little dwell-time. This was based on work that had been carried out in collaboration with the BBC Public Space Broadcasting team, whilst the screen was in possession of the BBC. One of the BBC's research teams conducted a series of surveys of the way that content on the screen was being consumed by passers-by in these spaces (Glancy, M. and O'Hara, K. 2008). This work was followed closely at the time and details of the survey were shared with the author and subsequently published as a BBC White Paper. In addition, they were also able to calculate the amount of time that passers-by would dwell in the space. The recommendation that the optimum duration of around three minutes for each single episode when projected by the screen was one of their findings and integrated into the design strategy for each presentation. Each of the video installations included the

presentation of photography taken in and around the screen and the environs of the city centre. A ambient soundtrack was included in order to capture the attention of passers-by. All sections of the installation were framed with details about the Project and the artists involved with motion graphics that brand each of the videos. Each of these multimodal elements was created with the interactive requirements of visitors to the space. From the amount of time that it was assumed that passers-by would dwell in the space to the need to capture the attention through the use of the soundtrack.

There are two critical issues here that have an impact on the way that media content is managed on the basis of how aspect the physical space determines how inhabitants use and engage with it. Firstly, the choice of content adds to this notion of the screen acting as a mirror for the space around it, as a reflective space for participants. Second, the duration of each of the episodes for this commission was based, at least partly, on an assumption of the level of mobility expected of participants and the average length of time that they dwell within the space. Visuals are less likely than sound to capture the immediate attention of inhabitants of the space. All of these issues in relation to the organisation and management of content for urban screens indicate some important new avenues for research. They all have implications for the way that augmented public space is characterised in of terms locality and how this impacts on their character of display. Framing is central to how we begin to understand the display strategies for media content intended for urban spaces and fundamental to how we form an understanding of augmented public space. The compositional characteristics mentioned above lead directly to issues of identity and branding since augmented public space is so often dominated by branding, advertising messages and information displays that contain more subtle forms of branded message.

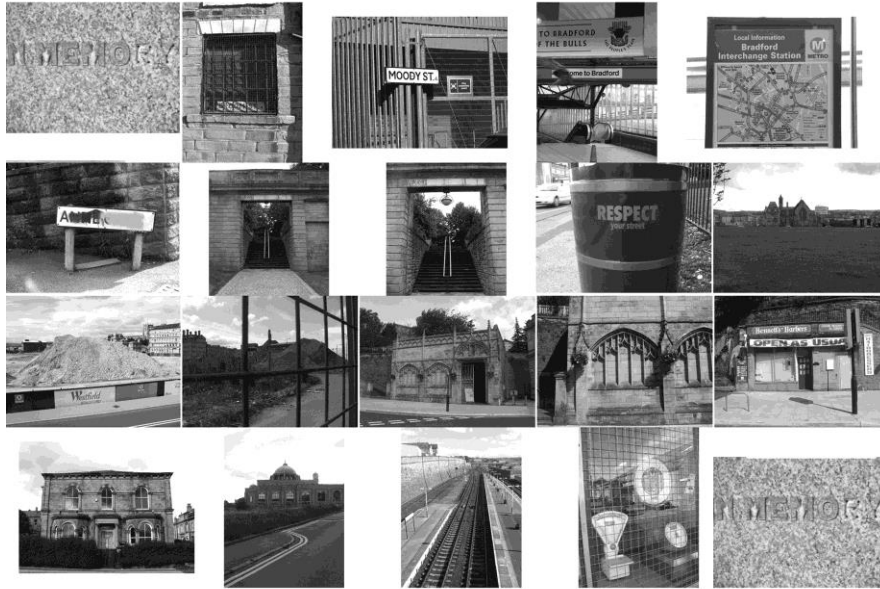


Fig 6.2 - Extracts from the “Bradford Central” installation for Bradford’s Big Screen as part of the STIR Contemporary Arts Festival, 2007.

Thus, the character of display in augmented spaces such as this is exemplified in the spatial properties and the design of content indicates both place and location. In addition, both aspects of framing connect the character of public display in more general terms with features of the surrounding space and can, therefore, be translated onto other features of augmented public spaces. Framing can also be related to the actual physical structure of urban spaces, indicating, for example, entry points and navigation paths through the space, or suggesting the extent of boundaries and borders.

Space and Site-specificity

Some of the embodied characteristics of framing can be brought in to help explain important aspects of these new augmented spaces. Indeed, it is suggested here, that at least some aspects of experience of augmented space can in fact lead to the potential for an enhanced sense of place and that the situated nature of media displays and the mediation of our

experience of the urban through the body, as an anchor, a consequence of which actually reinforces the situated nature of the consumption of media. It is evident that the “site specific” (Kwon 2004, McCarthy, 2003) nature of these environments means that participants are not only situated within them, in the sense that they are embedded within the locality and therefore embedded within the context of the local, it is also the case that the body, as the fundamental structure through which content is framed, also means that participants are further situated within the context of the urban. This argument is an extension of what Anna McCarthy (2003: 10) discusses in relation to the widespread use of television in public space, “ambient television”, so called, that occurs in a range of contexts, commercial, informational and civic and its impact on contemporary visual culture. Her argument, which is adopted briefly here specifically in relation to urban screens and large-scale media displays, is that the widespread use of television in public space as a medium, can only be fully understood when analysed in terms of their context of use and in reference to the place and location at which the medium is experienced. In some respects this runs counter to the perception of television consumption as primarily a private phenomenon, consumed within the domestic environment. As a consequence, this “site specific” quality of urban screens, in a similar way, reinforces the situated nature of the experience of the urban and is, therefore, intensified as a consequence. Furthermore, these site specific qualities should be seen as primarily as one of mediating place and locality. That is to say, that place and locality, are mediated via the body. In the case of television it is the, “variability of television’s relationship to all spaces it appears” (ibid.). This situated aspect of the reception of television in public space is very similar to the phenomenon of urban screens. The site-specific nature of these displays embeds the medium within a local context. To add another detail to this argument, Moores (2004), suggested that, in relation to both the domestic use of communications technologies as well as the consumption of media content on mobile platforms, that there has become a sense in which it is possible to participate in acts of consumption, virtual conversations and other forms of interaction, whereby a, so called, “doubling

of place” means that participation has the potential to occur across more than one actual space.

The site specific nature of urban screens comes to light also when considering the evolution of what was formerly known as the BBC’s Big Screen network, which began as a partnership consisting of the BBC, LOCOG - the organising committee for the London Olympic Games in 2012 - and the local authority for each of the cities where the screens are located. At the time of writing the current network amounts to a total of 20 screens all located in major city centres. In addition, the local context in Bradford is also an important case where, for example, political aspirations of economic, environmental and social regeneration are being realised in plans to reorganise and rebuild much of the city centre. An integral part of these aspirations is articulated via an architectural vision that incorporates the large scale display of media content via the “big screen” as well as widespread public access to information technology. Alongside the screen Centenary Square (Fig. 6.4) plays host to shops, bars, restaurants, and two art galleries. This space also includes hotspots where inhabitants can connect wirelessly to the internet in addition to accessing media content and communication with others using mobile devices and engage in virtual interactions outside the space. Such an environment integrates all of the trappings of an augmented urban space. An environment where inhabitants are both physically present in the space at the same time as engaging in virtual interactions that occur outside of the physical space.

In virtue of their location in prominent positions within city centres, urban screens have the potential to become important public spaces in themselves and it is this potential that frames them as integral parts of the urban scene, as natural a part of the urban environment as billboards and advertising hoardings once were. They become important sites for the display of media content for public display and are frequently used to support major public and civic events within the city. This is why organisations such as the BBC, in partnership with local authorities, have become so interested in establishing ways of managing these spaces, because they offer new opportunities for

public participation and community engagement. Participation on such a scale has led to many experiments, such as in Manchester, where recently the use of these spaces has been investigated as sites for generating locally-based content and engaging users as active participants in events.

It is also important to take into account the actual physical context of these screens; each one is unique in the sense that the physical location in each case is unique in its design and its relation to the planning of the public space in which they are a part. In the case of Bradford the screen sits on the side wall of a photography gallery, it is owned by the local council and is located on the edge of an important site for redevelopment and as such is integrated into a wider space around it. This evolution is an important aspect of the local context, from the position and location of the screen in relation to other buildings, even relatively simple features such as the height of the screen can have a critical impact on its reception. Its position in the built environment and its relations to passers-by, their distance from the screen (proximity), their position and direction in relation to it are all determined by the features in the landscape such as the direction and position of walkways and desire-lines and the way that pedestrians perambulate through the space. The screen in Bradford is now owned by the local council and managed in partnership between the local authority and the local University. This local context in relation to the management of the screen has meant that many local organisations have become involved in its use, whereby schools, universities and arts organisations can influence, to some extent, the nature of at least some of the content and in many instances there is a local flavour to these offerings and the intention is to engage a local audience. For example, in Bradford, a local arts development agency - Fabric - regularly screens content created by local artists in regular curated 'slots'. In addition, the screen is used for projecting content for live events, including the display of public art, often using interactivity through the connectivity with mobile devices in the surrounding space or through the use of motion tracking sensors that elicit the engagement of passers-by.

In terms of analysis, these spaces are texts in the sense that they produce meanings and afford specific forms of interaction and in many respects in similar ways as the kinds of text dealt with in previous chapters. Both the building upon which an urban screen is placed and the space in which a building is located can be considered to be a form of *multimodal text*, and the consequence of this is that it “leads to considering how only a blurred distinction seems to exist between space and information, as elements of the space increasingly are powerful conveyors of information, whilst information - materialised into them - becomes more spatially related” (Aurigi, 2008:5). The framing of content in terms of visual design - similar to that described in Chapter Three - we can see that there are many aspects of the formal arrangement of content that clearly marks off cues relating to locality. Even when national news content is broadcast onto the screen it is framed with signs indicating locality. The title “Big Screen Bradford” at the top left on the screen in the. There is a separate pain of information on the right hand side of the screen devoted to bulletins and information advertising local events. At the bottom of the screen the *ticker tape* display has the title “BBC Yorkshire” and with latest news flashes of local news content, the local weather, news flashes and local travel news.



Fig 6.3 *The Big Screen*, Bradford.

There are other ways of applying the concept of framing and locality to aspects of augmented space. For example, as already mentioned the site specific qualities of all media representation that function in public space are

fixed and contextualised within the place that they are situated. The situated nature of all media representations within augmented space ultimately rests on the location of the body.

The body is always located in physical space. This is the case however much participants interaction with media representations outside of the physical space where it is located. Where the “doubling of place” (Moore) would suggest otherwise, it is still the case that even if the individual is distracted by content elsewhere, they are still fixed within the location within which they are situated. However there is some slippage here between the concept of embodiment and locality, and the two are inseparable given that the location of interaction in real space fixes the body to specific location. But at the same time embodiment extends the frame beyond the physical boundary of the body and its connection to its surroundings is constrained by the “margin of indetermination”, discussed in the next section.



Fig 6.4 Centenary Square, Bradford.

Struppek (2006) argues that urban spaces are themselves sites of engagement with the city which is, in a sense, the city as a self-reflective organism. In many respects, this has been the case ever since signage and billboards have been an integral part of the city in the modern era and where media spaces such as advertising hoardings that in themselves have become such a defining feature in the development of the urban experience

through the apparent saturation of visual messages. Now these spaces combine with many forms of digital information display, all of which coexist with buildings. On top of this the inclusion of large screen displays into strategic locations in city centres has created sites where dialogue between the city and its participants takes place. This gives a privileged position to urban screens, not because they employ any novel technology but because of their location and potential audience. It is this that provides their novelty and interest. It is the location of the screens within the urban environment that determines the context in which they are used and engaged with. Part of their transformative potential, therefore, is articulated through the dialogue that the city has with its inhabitants and the locality (Jewitt and Trigg, 2006).

Their positioning, in such prominent locations in city centres, means that the locality – the space in which they are positioned - has a direct impact on their function. There are two immediate consequences of this: first, their position directly affects the type of content that is displayed and its planning, management and organisation, and second, in relation to the way that content is specifically designed to engage with the inhabitants of the space in the immediate vicinity and surrounding space. In addition, their salience is given by their prominence in the locality, their size and position such that what is most significant is their scale and location. In the first instance their locations are selected to ensure that media content, in a variety of forms, can be presented to very large audiences. Thus, it is their site-specific nature that provides their novelty as Anna McCarthy argued this in relation to the pervasive occurrence of television in public space (McCarthy, 2001:2). But this site-specific phenomenon, especially when the nature of the display is taken into account, is equally as applicable to urban screens. What also makes them unique in contemporary urban spaces is that they occur seamlessly within the built environment. They have also become sites which major players in broadcasting use as a public medium and through their joint administration by both local authorities and organisations such as the BBC can result in tensions between local and national/global representations.

Framing governs the organisation of content in relation its orientation to the audience and ways that the branding of information is adapted to serve a local context. In this way the actual compositional and spatial structures of content and its branding function simultaneously to serve the requirements of the local context. Thus, the character of display in augmented space, exemplified in the spatial properties and the design of content indicates place and location. In addition, both aspects of framing connect the character of public display in more general terms with features of the surrounding space and can, therefore, be translated onto other features of augmented public spaces. Framing can also be related to the actual physical structure of urban spaces, indicating, for example, entry points and navigation paths through the space, or suggesting the extent of boundaries and borders.

As city centres are layering with dynamic information and media content and inhabited by users of communications devices, the more these technologies are either integrated with the built environment or encourage users to be dislocated and disassociated from it. This gives rise to another paradox. For example, in particular forms of virtual interaction inhabitants are present in spaces outside of their physical location. This will inevitably mean that the fundamental nature of space in urban environments as unified or fixed entities is brought into question and also questions the relevance of describing these spaces in terms of their physical boundaries. Thus, the urban environment, largely as a consequence of its integration with new technologies, is clearly shifting notions of mobility, from forms that are fixed within a specific set of physical relationships within a bounded space to much more transitory and boundless ways of treating such concepts as location and place. And in terms of framing, once you've drawn a boundary around an urban space as a physical entity the position of entry points can be established, for example, informally by the users of the space, or, indeed, by planners. The problem is, with augmented public space, once these boundaries become less distinct, so too will the manner in which inhabitants enter into it -- its entry points.

Not only has architecture and the planned aspects of the built environment within urban spaces become less stable as physical structures, but the saturation of display technologies has also meant that there is a further blurring of the distinction between the physical environment and digital display technologies and this leads to the questioning of the distinction between virtual and real. It also leads to the questioning of how framing works. This is especially the case with regard to the media layer where display technologies, including urban screens, digital signage in all its forms, as well as everyday use of computers and miniature screen technologies, not to mention the potential for virtual interaction, are all now superimposed onto the experience of urban public space. This gives rise to a further blurring of the distinction between *the real* and *the virtual*. Such an ambiguity can function at many different levels. Paradoxically, this means that the more virtual the interaction, the more embodiment matters. Where there was once a real physical boundary to urban spaces there is now a variety of possible boundaries that depend upon how each individual uses the space and upon the nature of the media with which they interact. Clearly, the physical structure of urban spaces is shifting significantly in terms of framing. A city-dweller might walk into a central square and be quite clear about its external boundaries on a physical level but in an augmented space where do these boundaries actually occur and at which point does a person actually enter the space? Therefore, establishing entry points here and any associated interaction in the form of paths is problematic.

Embodiment and Space

There is a need at this point to return to some of the specifics set out earlier in the Chapter because one of the most critical questions to come out of this discussion so far rests on where to locate the body within augmented public space. One way might be simply be in relation to an inhabitant's interaction with content, for example, that which is displayed on urban screens. There are similarities to what Manovich (2001) has described in relation the interaction inherent in the engagement with new media artefacts as "cinematic vision" and the "relationship between the space of the viewer and

the space of the screen” (Manovich, 2001: 103) but with one fundamental difference.

For Manovich the body is usually fixed at a single location, as it would be, say, in a seated position at the cinema or sat at a computer terminal in front of a display. The problem with this is that, even if the body is fixed, some form of mobility is required in order to interpret any of the signs and messages on screen; even relatively small movements of the eyes can have dramatic consequences on interpretation. Therefore, in the context of augmented spaces the body and its perambulation through an urban environment is usually highly mobile, both in terms of its transit through the space, but also in relation to any interaction with media content that might occur within the space, as well as any virtual in reaction occurring outside of the space.

As suggested earlier, the body itself acts as an interface both on a sensory level in terms of its reception of information from the environment itself as well as and in terms any reception of content or information from any technological artefacts, from personal stereos to mobile phones, all of which, can be argued, augment the body in some way. All of which can be said to augment the experience of the urban.

The consumption of media, therefore, becomes part of the augmentation of the body through the use of these artefacts. Featherstone stresses the “importance of the body as a framer of information and this has become more urgent with digitized media” (Featherstone, 2006: 235). Embodiment, therefore, becomes both a question of the situated aspect of experience and interaction with object and technological devices as well as processing other stimuli from the immediate environment around the body.

Thus, framing and the framing of information ultimately becomes a question of the body and its location in space. Like a mirror, the body is both the site of representation and is a representation itself. To return to the two main themes associated with embodiment indicated in the introduction. One, the

body is aligned with the lived experience, with its location and situatedness, its attachment to its immediate environment. This has been central to the consideration of urban screens discussed in the previous sections. Second, at the same time, the body is an image of itself. Both are key aspects of framing and embodiment. Both require analysis when considering the relation of the body within the urban context and especially the use of media technologies and the interpretation of media content.

A critical part of this argument is that as soon as we accept the role of embodiment we need to think about affect rather than cognition. There are, so called “affective relations” (Massumi, 2002 and Hansen, 2004) that are always implicit in the relation to the body and its surroundings, and this is no less the case than where media technologies are concerned. Affect occurs in relation to what is actually felt by the body as a sensory being, as an information processing organism. Affect is the initial and immediate response that occurs once the senses are engaged in interpreting these stimuli.

In Hansen’s formulation, media technologies have the potential capacity to “expand the body’s margin of indetermination” (Hansen, 2004: 5). Here, according to Hansen, through his interpretation of Bergson and subsequently Deleuze, this concept has become critical to an understanding of visual media, to an “...understanding of the body as a centre of indetermination, furnishes the basis for a philosophical understanding of image media” (Hansen: 5). This is almost identical to the way that Featherstone conceptualizes the body as a sensory organism that acts as a framer of information, but applied more specifically to the image and new media. The useful point here is that the body, through the use of tools and devices is able to expand into a virtual arena where the boundary between the body and its external environment is unclear. The body is extended into the space beyond its physical boundary, into the world around it, yet the boundary between the extent of the body is also made indistinct.

In this sense technology, and media technologies especially exemplify this distinction very well, can be seen as critical tools that can extend this margin

between the body and the world. It is suggested, that the same distinction can be applied to augmented spaces and the urban screens that have been used in the previous sections to exemplify them, whereby, the “framing function”, where the body and the position of the body in space becomes fundamental to our understanding of the medium. At this level of abstraction, the argument seems to rest largely on how we position or locate the body in space, rather than on any consideration of the nature of technology *per se* or its use in urban spaces. The body has a sense of itself; it inhabits real space and is positioned at a specific location at any one time. It also becomes an individual element in itself within the environment that it inhabits or navigates from point to point in space. It consumes and interacts with representations, as part of the structure of experience, for example. Yet the body itself must be represented in some way, as an appearance or an image (Featherstone, 2006).

Massumi (2002) captured the essence of this distinction with regard to the virtual and the relation between the virtual and the body (Massumi, 2002: 30), indicating that the two are inseparable and, moreover, this raises questions about the basis upon which the body is moved to action (ibid: 5). This idea can be applied to navigation and human mobility in general, in either real or virtual spaces (ibid: 134). This is important because the whole notion of navigation is predicated on the assumption that the body exists, or is always located, within real space. This is always the case even if a participant is engaged in some form of interaction in an implied space elsewhere. Even in virtual spaces there is a body that has taken some form of action and this action has occurred in real space. Further, it requires that there also exists the intention to move to another location, another point in space: another point on the map, so to speak.

Thus, another important set of abstractions comes to light. The argument here is that there is no clear boundary between the virtual and the real and in fact the two different forms of representation are interdependent and is an important part of argument in that the boundaries of framing are indistinct. Massumi argues convincingly that there are many representations, such as

TV images or indeed paintings, to take just two examples, that contain qualities of what has come to constitute the virtual: “Digital technologies have a connection to the potential and the virtual *only through the analogue*” (138). This ambiguity would lead us, therefore, to question any clear distinction between them as Massumi continues:

If all emergent form brings its fringe of virtuality with it, then no particular medium of expression has a monopoly on the virtual. Every medium, however “low” technologically, really produces its own virtuality [...]. (175)

Thus, committing all representations in some way to the virtual means that many of the visual representations found in the urban landscape can easily be labelled as such. In theoretical terms there is a link between the issues relating to the real and the virtual, the position of the body in space, and modes of representation in augmented public space.

Conclusion

Whilst some key aspects of embodiment have been incorporated into recent work on multimodality and Kress made passing reference to the body in work since *Reading Images* (Kress, 2003, 2010) this is done in reference to the “materiality of modes” and “affordances”, that is the meaning making potential of any given communicative artefact:

The materiality of modes has, as one other consequence, the effect of mode in relation to the physiology of the bodily reception and production of meaning (Kress, 2003: 46).

And later,

In the reception of the sign the *materiality* of modes interacts with the physiology of bodies (Kress, 2010: 76).

In the sense indicated above, therefore, an object’s affordances (in his case the text’s) constitutes, at least in part, its fit with the body and the potential of this to facilitate specific forms of human action and communication. This clearly includes forms of literacy and the creation of verbal and visual

meaning through such systems as composition and the “visual literacy” and understanding that this system affords.

Further, to put the argument about affordances more simply, there are certain modes and certain types of semiotic resource – ones that emerge from the interaction with the body, whether through sight, touch or any of the other sensory modalities – that are better at doing some things than others. Writing about affordances in relation to literacy in the context of the use of technology, Kress indicates that modes of representation, that is the choice of a particular mode used for specific communicative purposes, will: “[...] change, through their affordances, the potentials for representational and communicational action by their users; this is the notion of ‘interactivity’ which figures so prominently in discussions of new media” (2003:5). That is to say that some communicative artefacts are better at doing some things and other are not. In this sense meaning is usually generated via the simplest most efficient medium or source available. Further, modes will shift over time, dependent upon the efficiency with which modes facilitate communicative action, the efficiency with affordances translate the physical properties of an communicative artefact into meaning. For Kress, therefore, this is for the most part about extending notions of “literacy” as a linguistic phenomenon further from words and images towards the integration of modes on multiple levels as is so often the case with new media. But whilst there is clearly a role for the body in the type of argument developed in Kress’ later work and in expanding upon the issues developed in relation to visual literacy earlier in this thesis; embodiment it is not given the central role that has been argued throughout in this chapter.

This connection between affordances and the body is followed up by Brian Massumi, interestingly the following statement is taken from an article written by him describing artistic interventions in Linz, Austria, where large scale images were projections onto the facades of buildings in the city. Therefore, it connects aspects of the city as a site for ‘creative media consumption’, the use of large scale projections onto the facade of buildings, and, as in the final

part of the argument set out here, role of affordances and the point at which the body rests within a space and begins to dwell there.

The city's amenities offer what James J. Gibson calls "affordances" and Arakawa and Madeline Gins, "landing sites".

Landing sites are offers of useful connection and platforms for possible action pre-fit to the needs of the human body.

(Massumi, 2003: 5).

Affordances and landing sites, as expressed here, would appear to be a convenient way of dovetailing much of what has been said so far about framing and the body in this chapter, in particular, in framing's function in determining the existence of entry points in on-screen interaction that were established in the previous chapter, here the potential seems to be in establishing similar structures in urban surroundings and in the experience of urban space, in addition to whether the type of framing argued for in the this chapter, relating to embodiment and the urban experience, can be integrated into theoretical issues associated with multimodality, in that there are ways in which both texts, in the forms discussed within multimodal theory and here, as a part of the experience of the urban can be said to "prefit the needs of the human body" (ibid.). That is to say, that framing might encompass both and that affordances are very much to do with the incorporation or integration of the body into its surroundings. In visual design, for example, affordances give rise to the meaning making potential of texts. Here, as in the previous quote, through the experience of the urban, the body becomes the surface or the material through which meaning is made.

To conclude: it is important to note some of the similarities between approaches to meaning in both of the different disciplines mentioned in the previous sections. From the point of view of both multimodality and theories of affect, affordances and the body are integrated. Affordances come about with the use of semiotic resources and the physical properties of a text that is appropriate to the task at hand and, therefore, appropriate to the bodies incorporation of this into a system of meaning, as is the case with contemporary semiotics. On the other hand, the phenomenological accounts

discussed a moment ago; also fit into this account in the sense of an artefact's fit with the body. In addition, both perspectives testify to the multimodal or multisensory capacity of all forms of communication. That is to say, this is one assumption that we can hold on to with some confidence. So, embodiment does not exclude multimodality. In fact, it can be seen to reinforce certain assumptions about the nature of texts, their materiality and inherent nature as multimodal. In conclusion, there is room for both perspectives in this analysis, but with the caveat that in multimodal analysis more emphasis need to be placed on how the body itself acts as the frame for interpretation.

A Conclusion to the Thesis

Introduction: The Journey

If the research described in this thesis is a journey, then what kind of a journey has it been? At the beginning the attempt was made to understand the nature of visually oriented content in the modern media environment and specifically to establish whether framing could be used as a general concept to account at least some of the changes; changes in visual presentation of content; shifts in the composition and layout in document design across both printed and online texts; speculation about the impact of these shifts more generally, in terms of the wider context of visuality; or to explore the most effective ways to describe and analyse visually oriented texts. It soon became apparent that the breadth implied by this position, on both visual literacy and framing, was too much to account for many of the changes in the landscape of visual communication, many of which had been assumed to be as a consequence of the rapid development of new technologies for making, distributing and consuming images and texts. All of this occurred since the beginning of the thesis. Even screen-based representation are in a constant state of change, whereby content has migrated from the screens of a desktop computer, to the smaller screens on a wide range of hand-held and mobile devices now used by the a majority and that have become easily naturalised into our daily lives. In addition, as discussed in the previous chapter, the large-scale screens we now experience as part of the urban environment have become an integral part of the experience of the city. Further transformations have occurred in relation to the location of consumption of media texts. Therefore, to ignore these shifts in both representation and consumption would have meant that the outcome of the thesis would, in my view, have been far too limiting. But this was always going to be at the risk of presenting a thesis at an endpoint that might, at least after an initial reading of its findings, be interpreted as somewhat arbitrary and fragmented and added the further risk that the content of the thesis would lack structure and integration. For example, the content of the previous chapter on embodiment and augmented space was not envisaged

at the start of the journey. At the time, little was known about the impact of media delivery in urban spaces and the evolution of urban screens in the manner described in the previous chapter, for example. But to omit this from the account of framing would, in my view, have rendered it inadequate. In addition, insights into embodiment introduced in the previous chapter, representing some relatively recent innovations in semiotics, cultural studies and HCI and the overlap between these disciplines, were again developments that have occurred since the beginning of this journey. Thus, leading to the need to take a different position to the presentation of content, both in relation to framing and in relation to context and how this needs to be interpreted and analysed, let alone any assumptions derived about the most suitable methodology for this.

Tensions between different approaches to Visual Analysis

Ideas from many different disciplines have been brought to bear on the topics covered in this thesis. This is not least the case with the different styles of visual analysis that has been dealt with. But if we return to the key sections in Chapters Two and Three, it will be seen that there is a relationship between how the visual is treated within semiotics and how similar concepts are dealt with in fields such as art history. Indeed, the role of art historical issues in the service of the thesis is brought up again in Chapter Four in the discussion of schemata and the “cognitive eye”, for example. A tension working in the background during a large part of the production of the thesis was that between insights in art history and visual studies as compared to those in linguistically informed ways of looking at visual representation, as in the contemporary semiotics exemplified by the work of Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images*. Important parts of that tension have been discussed in some depth in Chapters Two and Three, and not least, the variable, ambiguous and, at time problematic nature of the term “visual literacy”. However, this term has received much acceptance in both visual studies (Elkins, 2003 and Mitchell, 2003) and in the presentation of the shifts in the “communication landscape” presented in the book *Reading*

Images (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996/2006). To be more specific, it may actually be the case that there are two different versions of visual literacy here and, as a consequence, two different forms of visuality that became apparent once the theoretical tendencies and these varying approaches to the text comes to light, especially given that they are in many respects derived from different disciplines. It still remains to be seen as to whether these approaches can be united. Alternatively, it might be instructive to reduce the significance of visual literacy given the concerns that this expression has generated in relation to multimodality and its apparent exclusion of other modes such as touch, sense of space and so forth.

It could be argued that one of the problems here is the apparent negation of insights from art history and visual studies in much of the earlier work in multimodality when it comes to incorporating the visual into an understanding of meaning making in multimodal texts. As was reported in Chapter Two, for example, an iconographic analysis of Botticelli's *La Primavera*, and one that makes reference to the mythological aspects of the painting, will very quickly yield valuable information about the composition and spatial aspects of the painting. In fact, it could also be argued that the interpretation of this image in O'Toole's (1994) analysis discussed there might not even have come about without reference to the iconography of the image, that is, without reference to forms of art historical knowledge that are required to uncover the narrative that the painting was intended to display, or at least the meanings that have been assumed in the art historical understanding of the image. Indeed, the phenomenon of reading paths and the overall orientation of the painting to the viewer could not be established without this kind of knowledge in place. If the subsequent argument about the general orientation of left to right, which was seen to be an important part of Kress and van Leeuwen's strategy, is established on the basis of convention, there will be many examples, similar to *La Primavera* that will contradict this. Aspects of Kress and van Leeuwen's "principles of composition" and the reading order implied by this do not appear to work in the same way for images as they do for language, or indeed as for painting or composite texts.

Whilst compositional structures clearly do exist in this manner, to generalise on the basis of this type of evidence is clearly not possible. Even down to the reading order of the each of the episodes in the painting and all of the elements within each episode. Here indicating that the painting should be 'read' from right to left. Michael O'Toole's (1995, 2004) social semiotic analysis, whilst himself sceptical about the relevance of art historical and iconographic details and the potential this affords for the analysis of the painting, embarks on his own survey of artworks such as this, seemingly in the absence of this kind of evidence.

But this also points to one of the major differences between words and pictures in the production of meaning, that printed texts for example, are usually much more linear than images. That, through the analysis of such systems as composition and layout, there is this fundamental difference in the realisation of meaning. That said, however, one of the consequences of the new media landscape is the potential at least for there to be less of a distinction between image and text. In addition, that writing in many areas of information presentation on the web, for example, itself has become less linear as a consequence of the use of, so called, hypertext and the use of links and pages to present information in a way that afford navigation and far greater choice of reading paths, as seen in Chapter Five.

In the social semiotic approach, the relations between image and text have not been dealt with in and of themselves. This is unfortunate, given that the combination of these two modes is at the very foundation of what Kress and van Leeuwen have said about layout. The interaction between image and text has, over the last two decades or so, been a distinctive problematic within visual studies and arguments presented by authors such as Mitchell (2002, 2005a, 2005b). Who, incidentally, also has much to say about the concept of visual literacy. Here the relation between image and text is ultimately one of power and ideology. So, in this sense would seem to share a great deal with work such as that presented in *Social Semiotics* (Hodge and Kress, 1988).

This last reference is well worth emphasizing at this point as there is one detail here that has cropped up on a number of occasions throughout the thesis and this is their exposition of proxemic relations in the image. To repeat this, that as a system within framing is recognised as a part of our ordinary everyday experience: closeness can either signify intimacy or hostility, depending on the context and situation of the messages conveyed and their relations with other signs. Now, referring back to some of the work in the previous chapter, there is also an “affective” relation here. We feel hostility. We feel intimacy. It is an important part of the sensory and affective system that helps us to make sense and to manage spatial relations. There is another important connection here between social semiotics and embodiment. And, as a way of concluding, I argue, that this connection between these two disciplines, and the way that space is managed in human interaction, is an area that is not only ripe for development, but as suggested towards the end of the previous chapter, that it is one way of integrating the different approaches to framing that have been presented in this thesis. As such, farming, if seen in this light, at least partially satisfies one of the original intentions of the thesis through the establishment of an integrated set of ideas relation to framing.

Some unresolved issues: Framing and Media Transformations

Whilst this journey has explored a variety of meanings attached to the concept of framing, it was assumed at the beginning of the research that framing could account for the following distinction, as a boundary or limit between content and context, between what is inside and outside the physical frame. However, what has been established has turned out to be something rather unexpected in light of this and this is in relation to the potential of framing as a way of dividing and separating modalities, as a way of making distinctions between content types as well as integrating them. But both of these issues still remain unresolved but suggest potential further avenues of research, especially into the further development of theories of multimodality.

Framing has been used variously across different domains of research and across disciplinary boundaries. In the first place this invited the desire to seek some kind of integration, a single idea or concept that could be used across more than one discipline to explain important matters in relation to the creation of meaning. But soon this potential for framing led to a resistance to the integration sought. Framing was being used in various ways to explain similar yet different properties. However, important connections have been made across different disciplinary boundaries. That is, between the semiotic and socio-cognitive application of framing. That is to say that they are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. Further work in this area may also prove to be fruitful, integration of these two types of framing may be possible at a theoretical level, but it remains to be seen as to whether this distinction would yield an appropriate methodology and, as such, a suitable means of providing evidence.

To speculate on this issue, this situation could be similar to the distinction between content and context, where framing functions to both separate and combine, in a similar way as a physical frame does around content, whereby individual elements are separated with the use of a boundary but simultaneously the frame integrates through the association between related items of content and the way that they are gathered into zones. Could this be the same as with framing if seen from the point of view of the separation between modalities – that framing both integrates and divides material, the ‘stuff’ from each of the modes?

Whilst many versions of framing, across different research literatures, have been defined – from art history to linguistics, social psychology, theories of embodiment – there are three versions of framing that have led the work in the thesis. Essentially three of versions of framing have been emphasised, the frame as a rectangular container for content and the internal structures that this implies – compositional framing - the frame as a cognitive structure or mental model derived from prior knowledge and expectations – structures of expectation - , the frame as the body - embodiment and - as the ‘ultimate’ frame.

There are also some genuine concerns expressed over the appropriateness of the term “media transformations” in the title of the thesis. It has been used to account for shifts in the physical means used for media delivery, as opposed to shifts in “modes of communication” which emphasises the representational structures that occur within media. Though not intended as an alternative, it did, however shift the focus onto some of the physical properties of media that have a direct impact upon meaning making. There are two further key areas that where title is still remains relevant. First, the nature of the content that has been analysed across the three case studies, beginning with two-dimensional representations that for the most part occur only in print and was presented in Chapter Three; a comparison between print and web and a subsequent focus on navigation and the visual presentation of online news in Chapter Four; the migration of content into public space in Chapter Six. Each of these case studies at least implied many of the changes that have taken place in the creation, distribution and consumption of media texts. Thus, the actual structure implicit in the ordering of these case studies, it is argued, points directly to important transformations in both the delivery and consumption of media texts. This is the case in relation to the structure and organisation of the texts themselves, content is more malleable, more flexible, similar content used across many different platforms and consumed in many different contexts. All of which are explainable in terms of change over time and the transformation of content that is required to serve these new situations. In addition, the theoretical shift from social semiotics, to cognition, to embodiment, indicates a similar shift in thinking over the duration of the completion of the thesis and indicates a kind of transformation that has occurred on a theoretical level. At the very least, from a sense of doubt about arguments that rely on the rhetoric of visual predominance, to establishing some theoretical concepts that can circumvent some of that and the examination of methods as a consequence. Therefore, each of the different domains of framing presented in the thesis has been used to account for different situations within which interpretation and analysis take place. Each constitutes a form of transformation in context, from representation in semiotics, to cues that enable us to understand the situation and context in which meaning is derived in cognition, to the

embodied and situated framing in the previous chapter. These also imply important transformations. That is, in the context of understanding, thinking, and theory as well as in terms of the methodology used to understand them.

Reflections on the Research Questions

The final sections of the thesis address the research questions set out at the beginning in the Introduction to the Thesis. It will present these as outcomes of the research. This is followed by a statement about the way in which the thesis constitutes a contribution to knowledge.

It must be admitted that this thesis as a whole is not structured in the traditional way. The nature of the project did not yield a simple, linear structure. In a sense this is what is meant by, and is a consequence of, the intellectual journey. It is also a consequence of attempting an interdisciplinary approach to the research as a whole. Whilst the intellectual journey that is represented across the contents of the thesis admittedly did not go in the direction that was originally expected has yielded many different perspectives across an interesting but complex and difficult terrain. Having said this, all of the required ingredients should be plain enough to see. A review of the literature and the 'state of the art' in a particular area – in relation to framing, this has been distributed across three case studies. A review of the research literature is not all in the same place, or confined to a single chapter. But a consideration of the various literatures alluded to are spread across all of the relevant chapters as and when they came along. That is, apart from the critique of visual literacy, whereby the first three chapters do at least start out by conforming to the traditional thesis format. But this does still amount to an interrogation of specific theoretical assumptions and the consequences of this critique on methodology and ultimately on the actual methods used to gather empirical evidence. Evidence, moreover, that is then used to either substantiate the theoretical assumption that were started out with, or to adapt them in the light of the evidence. This has been established, both as a consequence of a close reading of parts of *Reading Images* and other related publications that have

developed a particular form of social semiotics applied to visual communication, as well as its relevance to the development of the field of multimodality (a critique of visual literacy), but also in relation to the sources and associated methods appropriated from the socio-cognitive account (“structures of expectation”) and further with phenomenology (embodiment) in subsequent chapters.

Some apparent difficulties in relation to the use of the term Visual Literacy became the most important set of issues initially and these were developed in Chapter One in reference to the following question.

How appropriate is the term **Visual Literacy** when trying to account for the inherent multimodality in all forms of media texts?

Some of the concerns raised are primarily to do with usage and terminology in the first instance. As was mentioned near the beginning of the thesis, there is an ambiguity that is created as a consequence of the conflation of the visual with language simply in the use of the expression visual literacy. In addition, this conflation may in turn actually prioritise the visual in a way that is counterproductive in the sense that it obscures the potential of other modes that might be just as important in the analysis and thereby limiting the potential for a more genuinely multimodal analysis.

There is a point where a particular version of visual literacy had been used to account for changes in modes of communication (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996:21-33) and a perceived shift towards more visually oriented means.

In addition, this expression has been used as part of an account of shifts in modes of communication, how appropriate is this?

However, attempting to incorporate visual literacy into the debate about communication shifts may also have been counter-productive. The very first strategy at the beginning of the project and this has been most useful in generating the “critique of visual literacy” and to show how similar issues are dealt with from other perspectives, most notably, from art historical thinking

and broadly similar aspects of visual and cultural studies. However, this has not necessarily provided any new understanding in relation to the analysis of contemporary media. The term visual literacy is useful in that it has become an important competence in relation to the use of new technologies, in education for example, but it is not so useful in relation to making broader generalisations about communication, semiotics, or indeed in relation to broader statements about multimodality in particular. Whilst visual literacy can be seen to be a multimodal phenomenon, it may not be as useful as once thought in relation to incorporating both language and visuals into the wider spectrum of multimodal communication.

In relation to the intellectual journey as a whole, whilst highly productive as a way of beginning a discussion of the “communication shifts” associated with the use of new media technologies, visual literacy is limited in the way that it is dealt with in the literature as well as the treatment of this issue in the first part of the thesis. To extend the critique beyond semiotics and to see this concept even more in the context of visibility and recent work in visual theory and visual culture would be highly instructive and indicates further potential in future.

As with the above, framing was an issue from the outset and has been discussed in various ways throughout. But it was not long before certain limitations were apparent.

Is the way that framing and composition in multimodal accounts, especially in Kress and van Leeuwen’s, sufficient to account for the richness and flexibility inherent in new media forms?

Framing, in *Reading Images*, it was seen that there were limitations here too which were discussed in detail in Chapter Three. There framing was seen to be a set of spatial constraints that occur within the image, as an internal structure that organises content within the frame. The problem is that this style of framing that is internal to composition, seen as a system that is only part of an overall compositional scheme. The impact of compositional

framing excludes the potential of seeing framing as a system or structure of meaning that is generated from outside of the frame. This leads to a further criticism of the approach taken in *Reading Images*: the apparent lack of context, that is of material that is instrumental to making meaning that resides in the space beyond the text. That is, a lack of reference to material outside the physical boundaries of the object itself, either through prior knowledge of the interpreter – in the head - or through the position and location of the body – in the world.

In addition, it is still not clear the extent to which these ideas can be applied effectively to account for the “richness and flexibility of new media forms”. Many of the examples used have been from newspaper front pages, yet, working back on the analyses in Chapters Two and Three, it is clear that the framing structures that were applied there do not work as effectively for other forms and other spaces that occur. This is the case with the migration of content onto a wide range of displays, just as much as it is the case with painting. Some of the “principles of composition” and the type of framing that is derived from this do not appear to work beyond that of print and to some extent for the presentation of news content on the web.

To counter what was perceived at the time to have been an absence of context in the approach taken in *Reading Images* and other subsequent publications, alternatives were sought and came initially from the consideration of a cognitive understanding of aspects of visual processing and the application of “expectations” in relation to the interpretation of media texts.

If not, which other methods and approaches might be used in order to provide a more thorough account of framing?

What then became a limitation in the cognitive account, the absence of any real evidence to identify cognitive structures assumed to be at play, gave rise to the further work on embodiment as yet another alternative way of characterising framing.

Different accounts of framing were being sought at the outset of the project, so too were any connections between the different forms of framing explored throughout the thesis. This led to a desire to integrate these different explanations and to see if there was any facility in developing these connections into a full-blown system or perhaps even a general theory of communication with framing at the main area of interest. With the benefit of hindsight, this aspect of the project turned out to be far too ambitious. That said, all chapters in the thesis have considered different forms of framing: compositional, socio-cognitive, or phenomenological.

Is there any way of integrating different ways of characterising framing in the different accounts described in the thesis?

In the end this turned out to be very similar to the intention to embed the concept of visual literacy into other work associated with the visual. The desire to find an integrated set of ideas relating to framing, one that would work at many different levels; that in turn could straddle different disciplines; that could account for many different media forms; came at the very beginning of the research and in a similar way to the critique of visual literacy this intention also became problematic at a critical point in the research. There may well, however, still be potential in continuing to develop framing from the point of view the use of space and in terms of proximity in particular. Proximity does seem to be flexible enough to bridge across the different domains that the thesis has explored: semiotics, interaction and the body. In addition, framing and proximity can be seen in terms of the reading paths that occur as consequence of this, the provision of spatial and contextual cues and the judgement and choices that users make in relation to content, as well as to govern the position and location of the body as it dwells within a space. These are all connected through framing: compositional, socio-cognitive, and phenomenological. Thus, a subsequent question could be applied here. How can framing, from the point of view of governing the proximity of elements within media texts be applied so as to unite thinking across the domains of semiotics, cognition and embodiment? Again, this

indicates potentially new avenues of research based on the outcomes discussed in the thesis.

In Chapter Three semiotic resources were isolated and labelled as such. They were then analysed in relation to their function in the overall design of a selection of multimodal texts. What came after that, most notably in the survey in Chapter Five, was an investigation of some of those resources in the analysis of the actual and physical use of some of those resources in situ.

In terms of methodology, how do we set about isolating design elements in multimodal texts that frame the actual interaction itself?

This much was achieved in Chapter Five. However, whilst it is possible to find a number of ways of establishing the first moves that reader make as they begin to make sense of specific reading tasks in interaction, as well as to find some evidence that judgements were being applied to the choice of a particular path, it was not possible to associate these in any way to actual cognitive structures, as was the intention at this point, the evidence is just not available in order for this to be substantiated.

However, they may again be potential - which would also facilitate the use of framing as a concept across different disciplinary boundaries - of bringing the different styles of empirical research and the methods that come with these together in some way. This is also true of the methods introduced in the final Chapter relating to the experience of the body as it traverses the city and especially the media representations that the body is confronted with in these locations. There are still some elements that were discussed earlier in the thesis that are in existence here, especially to do with branding and identity, for example, as it becomes associated with forms of institutional discourse, from information displays to other types of corporate media experienced in these spaces. The body and affect can be seen to be central to an

understanding of these phenomena. This indicates a further area of research to be developed from this case study.

Semiotic resources - the signs themselves - are a particularly potent tool in the analysis of texts from the point of view of framing and need ultimately to be attached to our developing understanding of embodiment. This was attempted briefly in the final chapter.

Can framing be used to account for important shifts in media delivery and the context in which media is consumed?

Framing can be used to indicate important shifts relating to the consumption of media. This was established in Chapters Three and Six. In the first instance, the application of compositional framing to the translation of layout elements across print to screen facilitates the potential to establish those elements that are constant across both platforms; both types of text, as well as to establish which elements may have become redundant in the new setting.

Second, in relation to embodiment, the work of Mark Hansen is of particular interest here, especially in his general argument about the apparent newness of new media (Hansen, 2003) that is evidenced by the affective relations between the viewer/participant in the engagement with new media art. Whilst it was not possible to provide the same level of critique of method with the visual and the compositional framing in semiotics or with the socio-cognitive approach to theories of embodiment and affect that came towards the end of thesis, there is still a pressing need to make critical judgments about the use of framing in this context. As an approach in itself embodiment seems enticing, but the potential of this approach still needs to be fully tested.

Contribution to Knowledge

Some of the answers above can be developed into further research questions and toward new strategies for research. Others provide the basis of a claim that the work presented in the thesis constitutes a contribution to knowledge. Briefly the contribution made by the thesis is as follows:

1. The integration of many different facets of framing as a theoretical tool and subsequent methodologies applied to the interpretation of media texts.
2. Testing of a range of techniques applied to the study the visual component in media texts from an interdisciplinary perspective.
3. A thorough critique of the concept of visual literacy.
4. Publication and subsequent work that has been generated by the work presented in the thesis.

Though much less ambitious in scope than originally intended, some general points about the use of framing as an analytical tool have been established. This was seen specifically in terms of a set of proxemic relations that came out of the research into compositional framing, as a code that both separates and integrates types of content and serves well the representational and descriptive approach to media texts that is at the heart of social semiotics. This relation can be seen as a more specific way of accounting for spatial characteristics of media texts. That is, both within the internal mechanisms of composition, but also in relation to the positioning of aspects outside it, including the position and location of the body of the viewer/participant. Proximity also has a bearing in relation to cognition and the interaction with text from a performative perspective, from the point of view of what participants actually do with the text in terms of their first moves, their choice of reading paths and how these facilitate what has been described here as a 'context-driven', or topic-driven, approach to understanding media texts. Furthermore, proximity also has its uses within theories of embodiment and affect, whereby, the sense of closeness and distance can be seen to have a real visceral and bodily impact and one that is felt by the participant.

A range of methods and ways of gathering evidence to support theoretical claims have been tested at various points throughout the thesis. Content analysis of visual structures in composition was tested in Chapter Three, potential cues relating to the context of interpretation on the basis of the location of individual design elements in Chapter Five. Whilst, the phenomenologically inspired methods explored in the final chapter of the thesis probably do not carry the same weight or security by the use of empirical evidence as such as we are literally moved by proximity. This phenomenological approach is, however, compelling. So too is its incorporation into the kind of approach introduced into that chapter. It is also something that could be a central part of our understanding of new media forms and of framing. That is, if the body is seen to be the ultimate frame for the sensory interpretation of content.

The style of critique levelled in relation to the concept of visual literacy has been highly constructive as a platform for developing a critical perspective on social semiotics. Since the publication of *Reading Images*, whilst seminal in many respects and marking what was considered to be an important moment in the development of multimodal theory, it has never undergone sustained critical evaluation. Nor has some of the more general assumptions made about the visual that were made in it. The intention in the first half of the thesis was to embed the concepts used in this text to some of the wider debates in visual studies. In addition, an appeal to the rhetoric of visual predominance that seems to be part of the justification of this approach, the over-emphasis of the visual mode, might be seen as a limitation in the light of one of the key principles of multimodality: that all texts are by their very nature multimodal. Even after twelve years since the publication of *Reading Images* these are still urgent issues in relation to the development of visual studies. They are issues that still need to be discussed in the wider context of cultural and critical theory.

The material in the final chapter has already migrated into other forms of output. For example, the case study on urban screen and ways of interpreting aspects of the experience of the city as an augmented space

was been publishes in a book chapter (Allen, 2009a) Three papers have been presented at conferences and published in peer reviewed proceeding (Allen, 2009b 2012, 2013). None of these publications would have been possible without the work generated by the final chapter. Nor indeed would they have been possible without the preliminary work that came in the chapters that precede this.

The journey represented by this thesis has had to contend not just with a continuously shifting media landscape, which began with concerns as to how to account for the composition of media texts as content was being transformed, for example, from print to screen. It was also necessary to account for some other shifts that have occurred during the course of the research. For example, the rise in the use of mobile devices for the delivery and consumption of media content, or the growing awareness that consumption of rich multimodal media content that is now integral to the urban experience rather than the more traditional model of media consumption as being part of a more private experience. This at least had the benefit of returning the thesis to one of the issues presented at the beginning, which was the need to address some of the historical assumptions that were made about the nature of visual communication in the urban scene. This has brought into question the nature of the role of the visual in contemporary media and its role within the experience of the urban and needs to be seen in the light of other equally important phenomena, such as the role of other modes in the process of representation and communication, or the function of the body in the processing and interpretation of texts. None of these phenomena were envisaged at the beginning of the research. But the course of this journey has been developed in direct response to these transformations.

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